

Journal of Liberal HISTORY

Gladstone and slavery

John Powell

William Gladstone and the question of slavery, 1832–33

James Moore

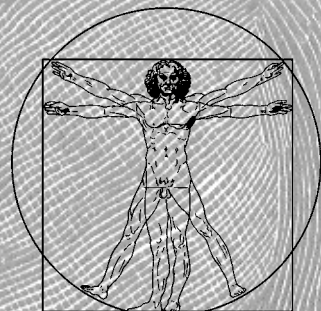
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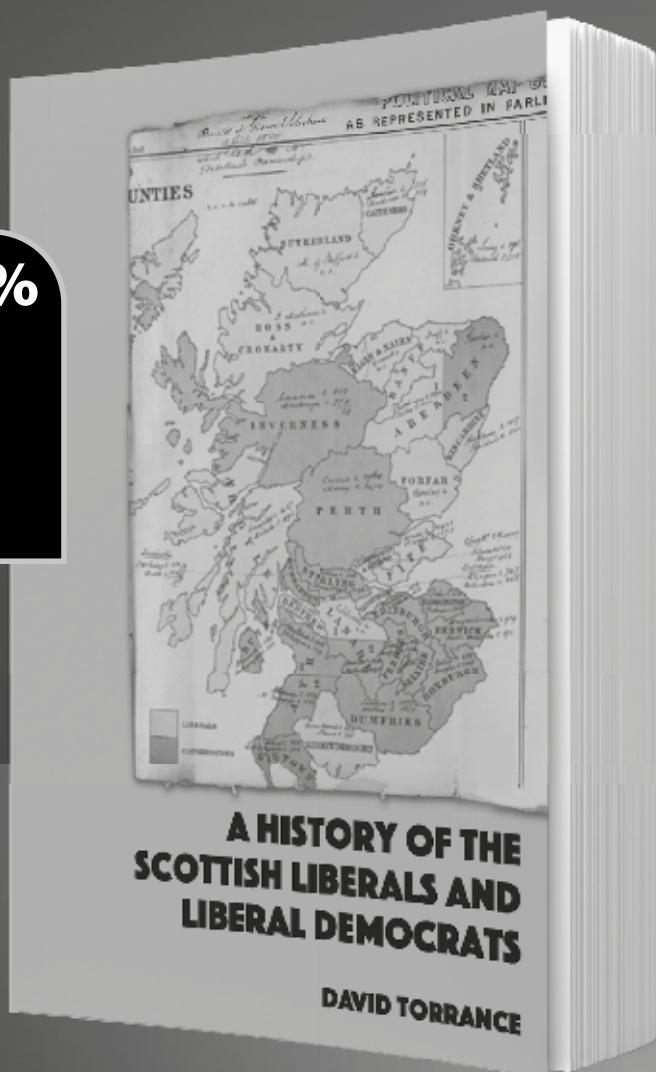
A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats

David Torrance

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Cover picture: William Ewart Gladstone in 1833

Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research resources, see: www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

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Liberal History News

Autumn 2023

Peter Hellyer, 7 November 1947 – 2 July 2023

Peter Hellyer was one of that remarkable vintage of radical Young Liberals which flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During little more than a five-year period this group played a key role in the formulation of a distinctive 'Libertarian Left' ideology which they applied to the highly charged issues of the day, including the Vietnam War, apartheid in South Africa, CND and the peace movement and the plight of the Palestinians. Since when faced with establishment intransigence they took to direct action, not least in successfully stopping the 1970 South Africa rugby tour, they provoked considerable opposition within the Liberal Party hierarchy, who felt, probably correctly, that the Young Liberals' highly publicised actions were losing the party votes and simply did not know how to cope with a youth movement that had considerable momentum, many thousands of members and constantly showed up the rigidity of Labour's Young Socialists. Also, the Young Liberals' willingness to campaign alongside others who were sometimes in far more extreme and illiberal

organisations who agreed with their stance on a specific issue, was often much too pluralistic for the party leaders.

I missed out on involvement in the contemporary Young Liberal Movement, being on the party's staff from 1962 and during the whole period. However, I was often called on to attempt to mediate but given the way that Jeremy Thorpe, then leader, mishandled the situation and even publicly attacked his own youth movement, all efforts were futile. The rift between the Liberal establishment and the Young Liberal Movement led to the appointment of a three-person Commission of Enquiry in December 1970, chaired by Stephen Terrell, a leading QC and Liberal candidate.¹ Possibly because there was no simple formula available to combine discipline with passion, its few conclusions came to nothing.

Peter Hellyer was a key participant throughout this period, not least as the Young Liberals' International Vice-Chairman from 1967 to 1969. Surprisingly, given his capacity for producing beautifully written English in later publications, he did not

contribute to the two books of essays published by the Young Liberal Movement in 1967 and 1971.² As a key officer, together with Louis Eaks, another officer of the movement, he visited the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Komsomol, the youth section of the Communist Party. Hellyer and Eaks insisted on varying their allotted programme to visit the tomb of Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, and, in Kiev, they asked party officials to explain the nature of Ukraine's separate national identity.

Later, key officers of the Young Liberal Movement abandoned it and, somewhat perversely given their trenchant criticisms of the 1966





Peter Hellyer, David Steel and the UAE Founding Father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, circa 1975.

Labour government, Peter Hain, George Kiloh and (temporarily) Simon Hebditch, joined the Labour Party, or, as in Hilary Wainwright's case, left mainstream party politics altogether, or, as with Lawrie Freedman, became a knight of the realm and one of the country's top defence experts and had to steer clear of active politics. Peter Hellyer, however, remained involved with the Liberal Party and, later, the Liberal Democrats. He was as radical as the others on key issues but while they were often more impetuous he was more thoughtful, particularly on the ways and means of achieving change. His approach to politics was in fact similar to that of his Young Liberal colleague, Tony Greaves, but without the occasional irascibility of the latter.

Peter's connection with the Palestinian cause following

the 1967 Arab-Israeli War led him to a deeper involvement with the Arab world and this became his abiding interest. In Sudan he met his late wife, an Egyptian of Sudanese-Moroccan heritage, and converted to Islam. In 1975 he was part of a Liberal Party delegation to the recently independent United Arab Emirates (UAE). This visit developed into a deep relationship with the country and he wrote a considerable number of books on the archaeology, natural history and cultural history of the region. Apart from a three-year sojourn in London in the 1980s, he lived there from 1978. For some time he also ran the first English-language radio station in the UAE and was the editor of its main English-language newspaper for more than a decade. He was highly respected in the country and in 2010 he was granted

Emirati citizenship. All in all, he spent nearly five decades chronicling the history, natural beauty and modern transformation of the UAE.

Peter Hellyer had a remarkable memory and, in the midst of his many commitments in the UAE, he wrote what is as yet the most thoughtful and best analytical article on the Young Liberal Movement in that period of five years, 1966–71, of radical action and youth involvement in active politics; it was published in this *Journal* in 2010.³ He also served as a member of the *Journal's* Editorial Board.

Peter never abandoned his connections with British Liberalism, and he would return to the UK for every general election, always to be involved with the campaign in the Scottish Borders alongside David Steel, his long-term colleague from their anti-apartheid days in the 1960s.

Michael Meadowcroft

- 1 Report of the Liberal Commission to the Right Honourable Jeremy Thorpe MP, (Stephen Terrell, John Foot, Gruffydd Evans), 1 July 1971.
- 2 *Blackpool Essays – towards a radical view of society*, ed Tony Greaves, Gunfire Publications, September 1967; *Scarborough Perspectives*, ed Bernard Greaves, Young Liberal Movement, September 1971.
- 3 'The Young Liberals and the left, 1965–70', *Journal of Liberal History* 67, Summer 2010.

Michael Steed

Shortly before we went to press, we learned of the sad death of Michael Steed, another member of the

Editorial Board of the *Journal of Liberal History*. A full appreciation will be published in the next issue.

Memories of a previous Uxbridge by-election

The resignation of Boris Johnson as an MP, and the ensuing by-election in July brought back memories of an earlier by-election in Uxbridge, 51 years ago.

The Conservative MP Charles Curran died in 1972, precipitating a parliamentary by-election for Uxbridge, which was held on 7 December. I was employed as a Travelling Organiser by the Liberal Party Organisation in the early 1970s and was asked by Ted Wheeler, Head of the LPO, to be the agent for the by-election. The party's main focus of attention at this time was on the Sutton & Cheam by-election, to be held on the same day, where Trevor Jones and Graham Tope had been working for several months – and where we eventually won a stunning victory. Therefore, there was not much in the way of resources to deploy to Uxbridge. Our strategy was to take support away from Labour.

The Labour candidate was Manuela Sykes who had previously been active in the Liberal Party during the 1950s and 1960s. Tim Beaumont (later Lord Beaumont) was influential in the national

Liberal hierarchy at the time. Evidently he was no fan of Ms Sykes because he said to me: 'Barry, do what you can for the Liberal vote but make sure that bitch doesn't win!' The Liberal candidate, Ian Stuart, was tailor-made to appeal to Labour voters, many of whom worked at Heathrow Airport. An active member of the Transport & General Workers Union, he was also Chairman of the London Airport Joint Shop Stewards Committee. However, this wasn't necessarily an asset in the more middle-class areas of the constituency; Michael Shersby, the Tory candidate, put in his election address that one reason to vote Conservative was that 'The Liberal candidate is a trade union shop steward'!

Like many local parties in London, the Uxbridge Liberal Association was weak, with a semblance of organisation in only one of the constituency's eight wards. The campaign was run from the front room of the Chair's house, Eileen James, and the helpers who turned out had to be directed from there. The London Liberal Party managed to arrange for 31,000 envelopes to be addressed by other London

constituencies (no computers in those days). On one occasion I looked out of the window to see David Steel, then the party's Chief Whip, assisting my father (who had driven over with piles of addressed envelopes) in trying to shunt his Ford Cortina back and forth because the clutch had broken!

A few months before, Cyril Smith had won Rochdale from Labour and he was guest speaker at the adoption meeting, which was attended by 85 people. The only vehicle available to collect him from the station was my minivan and I wasn't sure that he would fit in – he weighed 22 stone and was over 6 feet tall. But he did – I just had to ask him to move his knee so that I could change gear! My notes also record that Jeremy Thorpe addressed over 100 people at another meeting but at Russell Johnston's meeting only the caretaker and myself were present, as it rained very heavily that evening.

The final ten days of the campaign ran more smoothly, as I was given the assistance of Peter Bray from North Devon, Patrick Goldstone from North Dorset and Tony Richards from LPO, who handled the press. My report of the campaign states that over half the constituency received the Liberal election address two days before that of any other party – 'beating the Tory machine!' Our canvassing was concentrated

in the Colham, Cowley and Yiewsley wards which were producing the best returns, and on polling day we obtained 15 per cent of the vote in these areas. I reported to HQ that with the lack of resources in a four-week time frame and given that it was a marginal seat between the Conservatives and Labour, I did not expect us to save our deposit, which at that time required 12.5 per cent of the vote.

On polling day I nearly had kittens when I was informed that the previous night some of our exuberant helpers had held the candidate by his ankles to enable him to flypost from a railway bridge! The thought of him landing on his head was nightmarish. Eric Ridge, then Chairman of the London Region, was also a GP. To keep me going through polling day and into the count he gave me a massive tablet, which I could barely swallow!

In the end we increased our share of the vote from 9 per cent to 10.3 per cent, and Shersby defeated Sykes by 1,178 votes, a margin of 3.3 per cent. This was my baptism of fire in parliamentary agenting!

Barry Standen

Candidates Directories published

We are pleased to make available the first comprehensive biographical index to appear of every individual who has contested a UK parliamentary election under the designation Liberal, Liberal Democrat or Social Democrat for the years 1945 to 2019. The names are organised in fourteen individual regional sections, all available on the Liberal History website at <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/resources-type/election-candidates-directory/>.

We hope this index will provide information useful to historians, scholars and party members, and as a collective tribute to the many hundreds of individuals who felt committed enough to allow their names to go forward for nomination in the cause of Liberalism.

The directories have been compiled by Lionel King, to whom the History Group, and all Liberal historians, owe an enormous debt of gratitude. Corrections to the entries, and additional information from readers, will be most welcome; email Lionel on lionelking1964@btinternet.com.

Help Liberal history!

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

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

- Improving our website.
- Helping with our presence at Liberal Democrat conferences.
- Organising our meeting programme.
- Commissioning articles, and locating pictures, for the *Journal of Liberal History*

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



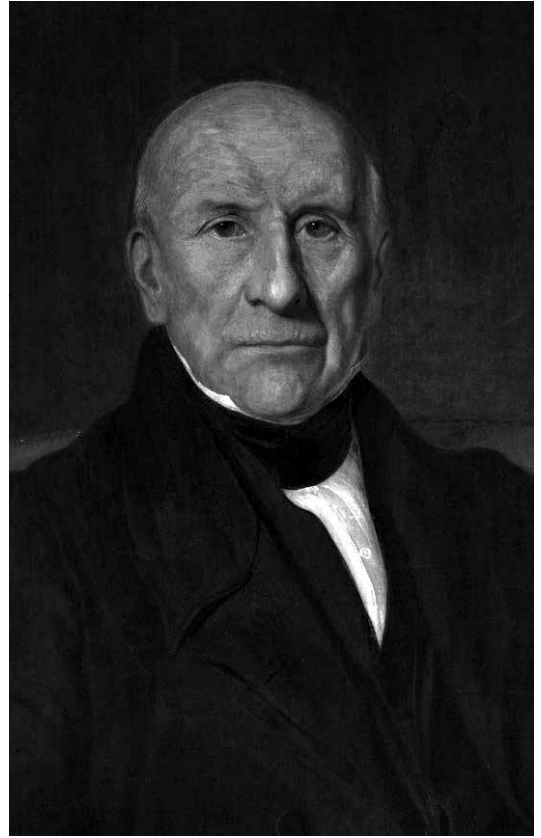
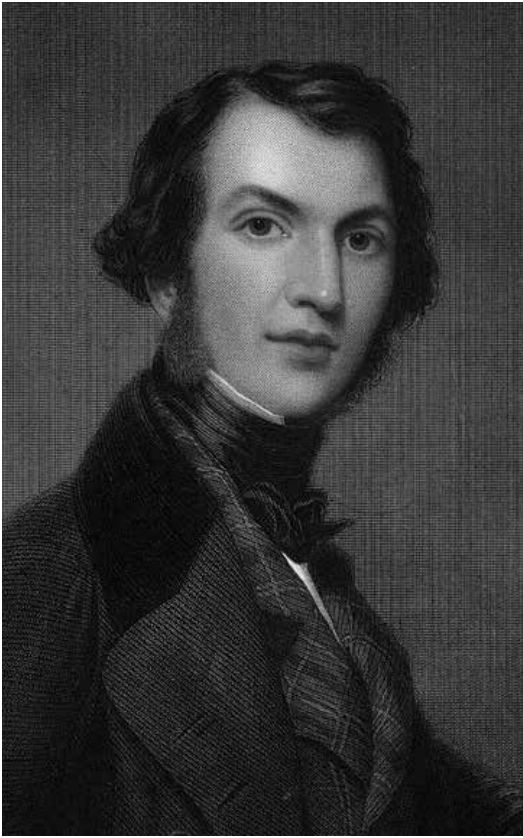
John Powell analyses W. E. Gladstone's views on slavery during his early years in politics, as a Tory parliamentary candidate and MP.

William Gladstone and the Question of Slavery, 1832–33

AS HISTORY AND activism have converged in recent years, the subject of slavery has become the touchstone for testing political morality in Britain, past and present. John Gladstone (1764–1851) was a wealthy merchant who, after the birth of his youngest son William in 1809, acquired slave-holding plantations in Guyana and Jamaica, and was eventually awarded £105,781 in compensation when slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833. William Gladstone never held slaves or owned plantations, but it was only a matter of time before his links to slavery would 'require' further examination.¹ In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, in the wake of George Floyd's murder in the United States in 2020, pressure mounted from activist groups to remove statues of the four-time Prime Minister in the United Kingdom, and to rechristen buildings, parks and streets that had been named in his honour throughout the old British Empire. Scholars and public figures increasingly embraced a new historical model – reparative or reparatory history – in which the past is interrogated for the purpose of decentring whiteness and any trait, value or characteristic associated with white power.² The historical effects of this activist impulse were brought into sharp

relief in August 2023 when Charles Gladstone, great-great grandson of William Gladstone, travelled to Guyana with members of his family to apologise for his father John Gladstone's involvement in slavery. They wished to apologise personally, and to donate £100,000 to support the University of Guyana's International Centre for the Study of Migration and Diaspora, in keeping with the ideals of reparatory justice. Four related articles in *The Observer* of 19 August 2023 preceded the Gladstone family trip, and these were soon followed by dozens of press notices and television reports from around the world. Almost invariably, Charles's relation to William was highlighted, along with large illustrations of the venerable old Prime Minister, now implicated in the family apology.³

The apology was not well received. On 25 August, Charles Gladstone addressed an assembly at the University of Guyana, acknowledging 'with deep shame and regret' his 'ancestor's involvement in this crime' and apologising 'with heartfelt sincerity' to the 'descendants of the enslaved in Guyana'.⁴ The university's vice-chancellor was gracious, but many were not satisfied. Yells of, 'it is not accepted' and 'murderers', were heard from the back of the crowd, as protesters waved placards reading,



William Gladstone, 1830s, and Sir John Gladstone, ca. 1830 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

‘Your guilt is real Charlie. Move quickly to reparations now.’ The apology and gift were denounced as ‘perfunctory’, one commentator characterising it as performance, merely ‘spit shining their halos’.⁵ Others complained that the money should have been given to community organisers or reparations groups. The President of Guyana, Dr Irfaan Ali, did not attend the ceremony, but he publicly declared that the descendants of John Gladstone ‘*must now* also outline their plan of action in line with’ the 15-member Caribbean community (CARICOM) ‘10-point plan for reparatory justice’, and he urged that those involved in the slave trade should be ‘posthumously’ charged for ‘crimes against humanity’.⁶

Patrick Robinson, Jamaica Member of the International Court of Justice, was sceptical of the apology. He observed that the United Kingdom could no longer ignore calls for

slavery reparations, and urged the British government to move toward payment of more than £18 trillion in reparations to 14 countries.⁷ The government stood by its position, publicly expressed during Prime Minister’s Questions in April in the wake of a similar apology by Laura Trevelyan. When Rishi Sunak was then asked whether he would ‘offer a full and meaningful apology’ for Britain’s ‘role in slavery and colonialism and commit to reparatory justice’, he declined, observing that the country should be ‘inclusive and tolerant of people from all backgrounds’, but that ‘trying to unpick our history’ was not ‘the right way forward’.

All the modern actors in this drama have plausible arguments to make. It seems laudable for Gladstone and his family to personally apologise to the people of Guyana, and to make some attempt at repairing the effects

of John Gladstone's slaveholding. It is understandable that the descendants of men and women once enslaved on John Gladstone's plantations would be sceptical of apologies, and would demand reparations. It is equally clear that a significant number of Britons raised on the virtues of individualism and personal responsibility would reject the proposition that they are responsible for the slave trade or the 'colonial mess' in Caribbean countries, as Ali called it. I am not advocating any of these positions. But if one cares at all about understanding Britain and the British people in the 1830s, it is necessary to move beyond the requirements of a particular activist agenda that are far from self-evident, and to pay some attention to what men like William Gladstone actually thought and said about slavery, to examine his reasoning, and on that basis to determine the degree to which he should or should not now be implicated in his father's slaveholding.

Prologue

Gladstone's opinions about slavery changed over time, as did the circumstances in which he lived. In a retrospect of 1894, he reflected on the real 'illiberalism' of his early Tory views on slavery, but noted what was widely understood in the 1830s, that they 'were not illiberal as compared with the ideas of the time'.⁸ Thomas Fowell Buxton, leader of Britain's abolitionist movement, believed that Gladstone was 'guided by principle', and genuinely seeking to improve the condition of those enslaved and hasten their emancipation. This was broadly Gladstone's reputation among both abolitionists and plantation owners, a position that enabled him to appeal to a wide spectrum of the electorate, from ultra-Tories to devout Wesleyans.⁹ The same could not be said of his father. To recognise such differences, however, is not to suggest that Gladstone's attitudes were wholly acceptable to all abolitionists, or that he never supported his father in the public forum. The debate over slavery was far more complicated than most activists today will allow, and

any understanding of the moment will necessarily reflect nuances that have largely been lost to us nearly 200 years later. It is a greater misreading of Gladstone's position to call him an 'apologist' for slavery than to argue that he was an emancipationist, though neither of these terms quite captures the fullness of his views.¹⁰ Just as there is a growing recognition that the slaveholding 'interest' was diverse, the anti-slavery movement also was 'a heterogeneous collection of anti-slaverys, with a variety of emphases'.¹¹ The considerable diversity on both sides of the slavery question, rooted in personality and method as much as in principle, helps to account for the favourable views of Wilberforce, Buxton and others closely associated with the abolitionist movement, and for the considerable differences on the issue of slavery between Gladstone and his father.

Gladstone was first elected to parliament in 1832, when Britain was a distant and different realm. He was slow to accept the absolute value of individual rights, but instinctively embraced the contours of mainstream political culture, focusing on practical rather than speculative activity, hence his distaste for abstract notions of freedom. His arguments on slavery reflected the logical extension of a principled conservatism rooted in Christian purpose, social hierarchy and a respect for tradition. In this world where Burke trumped Paine, inequality was an inescapable fact. Progress and emancipation were nevertheless both possible and desirable, and it is in this context that Gladstone first developed his attitudes toward slavery and his plans for emancipation.¹²

This is the cultural context, but the key to 'seeing' his position is more personal. Whereas John Gladstone and most others in the West India interest professed Christianity, very few of them applied Christian scripture in the way young Gladstone did, as a true and specific map to the ideal confessional state, where subordination was the fundamental principle of the greater good, and Godly transformation the highest goal. Sorting out belief from self-deception, and high principles from implicit,

and even explicit, racism, is difficult. But in beginning to make the argument that Gladstone's support for amelioration and emancipation was genuine and carefully weighed, with God as his witness, one need only read his *The State in its Relation to the Church* (1838) and

This article will examine Gladstone's position during his most illiberal period, just as he was entering public life as a Tory in 1832–33, and will explore how a misreading by scholars of the complicated relationship between John Gladstone and his youngest son contributed to a misleading conflation of their views on slavery.

observe the responses of friends and foes. In his understanding of the balance of moral goods, the Church was central to the maintenance of social order and justice, and salvation its chief purpose. Many disagreed with his assessment of the times, but no one doubted his sincerity. In later years, Gladstone himself repented of his *naïveté* in believing that the real union of Church and State might be restored, and he repented of his illiberal views toward slavery, which in 1832–33 he could only see as benevolent and spiritually motivated.

This article will examine Gladstone's position during his most illiberal period, just as he was entering public life as a Tory in 1832–33, and will explore how a misreading by scholars of the complicated relationship between John Gladstone and his youngest son contributed to a misleading conflation of their views on slavery. It will then seek to explain the reasoning behind Gladstone's support for gradual emancipation and the Abolition of Slavery Bill. While he considered the use of the term 'emancipation' disingenuous, he was committed to a practical plan for bringing it about in the near future. Effective and supervised state-sponsored Christian education would in time lead to what he considered to be the most morally consistent plan for abolishing slavery, and would accomplish four related goals: redressing the failures of the British government,

preparing enslaved workers for civic life, vindicating the centrality of the Church of England, and freeing the slaves.

Two historiographical trends have impeded a meaningful understanding of Gladstone's early attitudes toward slavery. The first

involves the increased attention paid during the past two decades to patterns and practices of slaveholding in the British Empire, and especially to the financial benefits accrued by the descendants of slaveholders from the time of emancipation

in 1834. The 'vast possibilities' of compensation records were noted by Eric Williams in his pioneering work *Capitalism and Slavery* in 1944, but it was not until Nicholas Draper's *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the end of Slavery* in 2010 that any attempt was made systematically to demonstrate the breadth and particularity of the financial legacy of slavery.¹³ Draper's detailed examination of compensation records formed the foundation of several related projects which aimed to 'put slavery back into British history'.¹⁴ He was co-founder of the initial project, 'The Legacies of British Slave-ownership' (2009–12), and co-director of its successor, the 'Structure and Significance of British Caribbean Slave-ownership' (2013–15). These projects led to an important book, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, and the creation of a searchable database maintained by the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership (LBS) at the University of London, providing detailed information on enslavers, estates, related maps, and commercial, cultural, historical, imperial, physical and political legacies of slave ownership, which in turn have spawned or enhanced dozens of more narrowly focused works.¹⁵

Chronologically, these historiographical developments coincided with the Black Lives

Matter movement, formed in the United States in 2013 but widely internationalised following George Floyd's murder in 2020. Traditional history and activism combined to produce an atmosphere particularly receptive to interpretations of British history that emphasised the destructive roles of racism and capitalism, even within the anti-slavery movement. In 2012, Richard Huzzey could still argue that there was 'no vindication for colonialism or racism in the truth that Victorian politics and culture were not fundamentally mercenary, conspiratorial, or amoral'.¹⁶ By 2020, however, even British hostility toward slavery had been routinely racialised and the lines between historical scholarship and activism further blurred. Abolition in 1834 was, in Padraic Scanlan's *Slave Empire*, simply 'the first breath of a new British world where white supremacy, framed as a benign, raceless ideal of human flourishing, justified new kinds of conquest and domination'.¹⁷ Similarly, in an outstanding study of the anti-abolitionist interest in Britain during the 1820s and 1830s, Michael Taylor argues in the adjunctive preface and epilogue that those who were not active abolitionists were necessarily 'pro-slavery', implicating Gladstone as one of 'those people' – 'their money, their ideas, and their politics', which 'bequeathed the true and terrible legacies of British slavery'.¹⁸

The work of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery and recent studies such as those by Taylor and Scanlan illustrate the current historical challenge in examining the issue of slavery in nineteenth-century Britain. It is just possible to tell a story repugnant to contemporary morality, but difficult to do it without apology and at least nominal identification with an activist agenda that has little regard for the past per se.¹⁹ And while the early works of Draper, Hall and others are essential in better understanding why a generally progressive society was politically divided over the issue of slavery, their historical work has increasingly been used as so many tools for promoting contemporary social goals.²⁰ Today the Centre is committed to 'reparative history',

distancing themselves from the concept of 'a disinterested examination of the past'.²¹ This approach to history has in recent years served as a template for the public discourse on race, slavery and reparations. It has been embraced by much of the academic community, and its theoretical assertions have become required signalling for anyone seeking reconciliation, and foundational tenets of organisations calling out the descendants of British slaveholders. The CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC), for instance, developed a '10-point Reparations Plan' in 2013. By the time Charles Gladstone apologised in Guyana ten years later, this had become the '10-point Plan for Reparatory Justice', with new language calling for a 'reparatory justice approach to truth', to which Charles Gladstone assented even as his efforts were being publicly rebuked.

The goals of acknowledging injustices and setting them right are admirable, but not exactly coterminous with the kind of professional history which seeks to understand the past on its own terms, and to make judgments about the past without primary reference to a future that could not have been known or comprehended. By the time Professor Matthew J. Smith assumed the Centre's directorship in June 2020, this particular 'approach to truth' had widened its remit to include medical inequality during the Covid-19 pandemic and 'the recent horrific murders of unarmed Black US citizens' as part of the struggle to deal with 'with the legacies of forced labour and abuses of Africans and their descendants'.²² The Centre's increasingly close association with activist rhetoric and goals has fostered an academic atmosphere in which the morality of the past is inherently suspect, and in which William Gladstone can be implicated, without serious inquiry, in 'crimes against humanity'.²³ To the activist, and increasingly to a growing number of students and scholars, it is enough merely to assert 'the fact' that 'we are all implicated in the legacy of slavery', with no distinction between circumstantial association and moral responsibility.²⁴

The second historiographical issue affecting the current understanding of the young Gladstone and slavery is mainly biographical, related to the natural tendency to focus on his later, more prominent years. Given that the issue of slavery and the attending period of apprenticeship was settled by 1838, before Gladstone became a Liberal or had risen to the front rank in politics, scholars have paid relatively little attention to his views on the issue, and especially little to his rationale. Two

Given that the issue of slavery and the attending period of apprenticeship was settled by 1838, before Gladstone became a Liberal or had risen to the front rank in politics, scholars have paid relatively little attention to his views on the issue, and especially little to his rationale.

important treatments written near the time of his death are Alfred F. Robbins, *The Early Public Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1894) and two chapters by F. W. Hirst in Wemyss Reid, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1899). Both are still useful in addressing Gladstone's early parliamentary career and drawing attention to contemporary sources, but they suffer from the authors' lack of access to private materials now widely available. Chapters Two and Five of David Bebbington's *The Mind of Gladstone* (2004) are essential in understanding the principles informing Gladstone's early thought and the gradual widening of his liberal sympathies, but it deals surprisingly little with the issue of slavery itself. Also useful is Peter J. Jagger's *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician* (1991), which is light on analysis but thorough in its use of early documents.

Only two works have dealt with Gladstone and slavery in any depth. Sidney Checkland's *The Gladstones: A Family Biography* provides significant but partial and divided information on Gladstone's role in his father's financial dealings in the West Indies. Roland Quinault's 'Gladstone and Slavery' was the first work to gather a wide range of underused documentary evidence. The power of the

article is in demonstrating the subtle similarities of Gladstone's sensibilities toward the institution of slavery across a lifetime, even as he adopted more liberal positions, but this necessarily limits a more thorough examination of his position at the time of the abolition debates. Quinault's fundamental scepticism of Gladstone's motives, however, undermines any attempt to explain the logic of his position.²⁵

None of Gladstone's earlier biographers could have imagined how central the disposition of the slave question would become to his reputation, considering that the issue seemingly had been settled sixty years before his death. But any

person worthy of their society's gratitude must periodically be measured against the evolving society they helped to create. Such reassessment is a form of social criticism, and thus within the purview of the non-professional historian, but it is also a form of biographical representation, and can only be successful to the extent that it cares for both. Students speaking out against 'black oppression' in 2020 were clearly wrong in claiming that Gladstone in his maiden speech argued against the abolition of slavery, and it is not credible to suggest that he was pro-slavery.²⁶ But at the same time the historian does no good in minimising Gladstone's opposition to immediate emancipation on grounds of moral fitness, which he unambiguously stated on many occasions, both before and after his maiden speech in 1833. Because no biographer has yet fashioned a convincing portrait of the young Gladstone, taking into account complex personal and cultural imperatives rooted in classical social models, Burke's principles, Canning's example and divine providentialism, his strong and consistent support for gradual emancipation has continued to be tied to the more extreme, 'pro-slavery' model so often identified with his father.²⁷

The Gladstones and the legacy of slavery

William Gladstone's connections to slavery are less unknown than misread. He never enslaved anyone, owned plantations, or held workers under apprenticeship (the seven-year transitional system of bound labour prescribed by the Slavery Abolition Bill). He supported the abolition bill, which immediately freed enslaved children under the age of six, provided meaningful amelioration of conditions for enslaved workers and ended in full emancipation for slaves held in the West Indies. Even the abolitionist leader Buxton encouraged abolitionists to support the bill for 'the good of the Negroes'.²⁸

When Gladstone was born in 1809, his father was already a wealthy merchant, engaged in trade, shipping and marine insurance. Earlier that year John Gladstone had become chairman of the Liverpool West India Association, and three years later acquired a joint share in his first plantation, Success (in Demerara), but his interests in the West Indies remained mainly commercial until the 1820s.²⁹ His part in the promotion of British slavery has been extensively studied, first because of the 1823 slave uprising in Demerara that began on the Success Plantation and ended with the death of a missionary accused of preaching sedition.³⁰ The political and public inquiry into the uprising, as well as his widely published

examined is that John Gladstone received one of the largest compensation payments from the government when slavery was abolished in 1833. In anticipation of the government's plan to compensate plantation owners, he frequently used his sons Tom and William, both MPs in the 1830s, as liaisons in his lobbying efforts, though their roles were limited.³¹ All of the Gladstone children benefitted financially – William having been gifted £15,000 by 1843 – but these legacies were beyond his control, and in any case were not necessary to his good education, privileged lifestyle or political preference.³² His great opportunity in Newark in 1832 had everything to do with his energy and brilliance in denouncing Reform in Oxford during the previous year. There was much confusion in the press about which 'Gladstone', son or father, was the subject of any particular story, which further emphasised the patronym alone. Parliamentary reporters sometimes confused Tom (b. 1804) and William, reverting to the indiscriminate 'Mr Gladstone' when they could not be sure who was speaking.³³ In relation to slavery, as late as June 1838, the *Jamaica Royal Gazette* erroneously reported that the Holland estate was 'the property of Mr. W. E. Gladstone, member for Newark'.³⁴ Had this been true, he would have been the owner of a plantation worked by apprentices, which would account for some of the more extreme political accusations sometimes levelled against him. But it was not true.

The second reason that the Gladstone connection to slavery has been so carefully examined is that John Gladstone received one of the largest compensation payments from the government when slavery was abolished in 1833.

newspaper exchange with the Quaker abolitionist James Cropper, revealed to the larger British public, and to later historians, much that had previously been unknown about the dynamics of absentee slave ownership in the British West Indies.

The second reason that the Gladstone connection to slavery has been so carefully

John Gladstone had privately informed his sons in May 1838 of the future settlement of his estate, but made it clear that the transfers would not be effected until 1 January 1839, five months after the ending of apprenticeship, and even then, only the profits from their father's many business ventures would be turned over to his children prior to his death.³⁵

As a boy, Gladstone was fascinated by politics.³⁶ Before the age of twelve, he was already following local and national issues,

and beginning to develop a critical sensibility regarding political language and method. This natural inclination was sharpened by the tumultuous aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, and by his father's complex and often disappointing political career, which included political friendships with George Canning and William Huskisson, who served as MPs for Liverpool between 1812 and 1830. It also reflected a more personal interest not common to his three older brothers, Thomas (b. 1804), Robertson (b. 1806) and John Neilson (b. 1807). He was aware of the controversial nature of his father's slaveholding, at least from the age of thirteen, and probably much earlier, and was conditioned at an early age to accept explanations both accounting for the institution of slavery and supporting its moral validity. In writing to his mother in 1823 about his father's exchange of letters in the Liverpool press with Cropper, Gladstone eagerly attacked Cropper's hypocrisy in condemning West Indian slavery while profiting from the sugar trade in the East Indies. Cropper's method was 'confused', he argued in the most stentorian schoolboy manner, withholding 'mitigating evidence', instead of appealing to 'cool and open argument'.³⁷ At the same time, he knew that his mother and saintly sister Anne were averse to the acquisition of slave-holding estates.³⁸ As the years passed, in the family home in Liverpool, and at Eton and Oxford, he was often reminded of the conflicting moral and commercial interests at stake as the debate over slavery and the fate of the colonial empire escalated.³⁹ But until 1832, this issue was only one of many for Gladstone, and subsumed under the larger rubric of politics.

Developing a response to slavery

Too much has been made of both Gladstone's active interest in slavery as a political question and the degree to which his views were shaped in deference to his father.⁴⁰ Quinault rightly points to half a dozen cases in which Gladstone read about or discussed the issue.⁴¹ One could

add a dozen more. But these cover a decade of time, and one will search in vain for any sense of cause on Gladstone's part involving the issue of slavery before 1832. He showed far more interest in Canning's legacy, Catholic emancipation, Liverpool politics, Church reform, the Eton and Oxford debating societies and, finally, by 1831 the great matter of Reform, which threatened, in his mind, the very foundations of society. It was only during his first campaign for Newark in the autumn of 1832, and in the debate surrounding the Slavery Abolition Bill in his first parliamentary session, that he began to study the question with any rigour, reading and taking careful notes about the actual conditions of slaveholding.⁴² Still, any interest in slavery and the West Indies paled in comparison to his reading on Church reform, the tithe, English history or poetry. Until the debate over the Slavery Abolition Bill and the attending questions of compensation, Gladstone was as likely to read the *Foreign Quarterly*, or Hallam's *Translation of Milton* or a draft of the Irish Church Bill, as anything related to the West Indies.

While it is true that John Gladstone was a formidable father and William a dutiful son, there was a kind of theatre at work in their relationship, particularly as young Gladstone moved into public life. His father was at once financially brilliant, permanently energetic, personally demanding and totally unselfconscious.⁴³ William genuinely admired his father, for his financial acumen, his daring entrepreneurship, his philanthropy and his Christian faith. It was no small source of pride for Gladstone to see these qualities combined in the building of churches and colleges, and it was edifying for the two of them to work hand in hand in raising beautiful and permanent edifices to the glory of God, as some fathers and sons might go for an afternoon shoot.⁴⁴ But John Gladstone's religion was mainly practical, and William was stubborn. He recognised his father's flaws and justified them – while simultaneously exaggerating his own hypocrisy and sinfulness. If his father's 'intellect was a little

intemperate', Gladstone admired his character and his deeply affectionate nature, and young Gladstone sometimes took advantage of this.⁴⁵ Of course William genuinely believed that it was his Christian obligation to be obedient – what more natural channel for the will of God than 'the wishes of a parent?' – but he never understood this quite literally to mean that he was never to conceal anything from his father or to always trust in his judgment, as his father had demanded of Tom.⁴⁶ William disagreed with his father on many specific and often major issues.⁴⁷ And though he often expressed his differences in terms of self-recrimination, or remained silent when necessary, his mind was seldom changed, particularly on matters of principle.

Knowing that Gladstone deeply admired his father, had been raised to accept slavery as an element of historical reality in a fallen world, and believed unquestioningly in Aristotelian principles of hierarchy, is it fair to say that his 'stance on slavery was essentially the same as his father's'?⁴⁸ Given their difference in age and employment, one might imagine this to be true. In 1830, John Gladstone was 65 years old, and had made himself wealthy by skilfully navigating a global market in the most uncertain times of revolution and war, while William, at 20, was not yet quite a serious scholar.⁴⁹ But it is not clear at that time how closely he identified with his father's views, or how carefully he had considered them. Between 1830 and 1832, William's university concerns were tempered by a rising seriousness of purpose, and it is at this point that one can begin to discern the contours of his personal perspective on slavery and those held in bondage by the system. He was still in many ways naïve, but also intelligent, good-hearted and quick to learn, qualities that served him well during his first experience of practical politics in Newark during the autumn of 1832. By the time the debate over the Slavery Abolition Bill rose to prominence in Britain, both father and son had publicly stated their views on slavery in

considerable detail, affording a good opportunity for examining their relative positions on the issue.

In the autumn of 1830, as reports of cruelty and abuse from the West Indies led to a rising call for immediate emancipation, John Gladstone published the pamphlet *A Statement of Facts connected to the Present State of Slavery*, which pushed back against abolitionists who were 'unacquainted with the negro character' and colonial society. His argument was thorough, and included many elements of the common case for slaveholding. Historically, slavery had existed 'since the origin and formation' of this world. Economically, slavery was necessary, for the negroes would not voluntarily work, given the 'relaxing influence of the climate' which led to 'a love of ease and relaxation'. Legally, slavery was sanctioned by 'acts of the British legislature' by which planters had acquired their 'right of property'. Politically, the 'reckless impatience' of the abolitionists was 'misplaced', for they had no 'property stake' and such a course would lead to the 'abandonment' of the sugar colonies by the white inhabitants. Gladstone acknowledged some occasional abuses, but reminded readers that there was 'brutality, murder, plunder and cruelty' even in England. He invited readers to compare the condition of slaves, whose 'comforts and wants' were generally provided, to the condition of workers in England's industrial cities and in Ireland. 'I may be told', he wrote, 'that "the slave in our colonies works from compulsion, the labourer here from choice"'. He granted this, but asked what the choice amounted to. 'Is it not either to submit to labour, which exhausts his strength and health for a bare subsistence, or to leave it and starve?' John Gladstone's recommendations were clear: support for Canning's 1823 resolutions to 'ameliorate the state of slavery, to improve the condition and raise the character of the people', but do not name the time or circumstances for some distant emancipation. 'It is not for me', he wrote, 'to attempt to say when a system should terminate which

Almighty God in the Divine wisdom of his overruling providence has seen fit to permit'.⁵⁰

William, then at university at Oxford, read his father's pamphlet in December 1830, but was completely preoccupied thereafter with the activities of the Essay Club and Debating Society. The subject of the moment was the Duke of Wellington, whose administration came under debate on 11 November. Gladstone caused a row by reporting the debate to the editor of the *Evening Standard* and declaring that 'the rising generation' had just pronounced the administration 'undeserving of the confidence of the country'.⁵¹ There was more than a little vanity and love of battle here displayed, as Gladstone had opened and closed the debate, and taken up a third of its time. On 17 May occurred the epochal speech in which Gladstone excoriated the reformers and marked himself in the university as foremost among the young debaters. This too he followed up with a letter to the *Evening Standard*, in which he sketched for the public the place that the rising generation would soon be taking in public affairs. Two weeks after his anti-reform speech, Gladstone first spoke publicly on the issue of slavery, in his last speech at the Oxford Union on 2 June 1831. There was nothing of the enthusiasm, the 'outgrowth of passion', that had made the anti-reform speech so memorable, and as a result he was not at his best.⁵² But he was prepared to address the proposal, 'That while all due precaution consistent with such a measure should be taken, the negroes in the West Indies should be emancipated without delay'. Gladstone countered with a carefully prepared amendment that fairly encapsulated the views on the subject he would take with him to parliament in 1833:

That legislative enactments ought to be made, and, if it be necessary, enforced – (1) For better guarding the personal and civil rights of the negroes in our West India Colonies. (2) For the establishing of compulsory manumission. (3) For securing universally the receiving a Christian

education, under the clergy and teachers, independent of the planters; a measure of which total but gradual emancipation will be the natural consequence, as it was of a similar procedure in the first ages of Christianity.⁵³

His approval of amelioration was generally consistent with his father's views, but already William was going much farther, calling for 'compulsory manumission' and for Christian education 'independent of the planters'.

Young Gladstone was knowledgeable about the West Indies, but he was far more interested in the question of reform and its implications for the state of the Church of England in British society. No one paid much attention to the speech and it was not, for a change, reported to the *Evening Standard*.⁵⁴ At that point he plunged into a project for gathering signatures from resident bachelors and undergraduates for a petition opposing the Reform Bill, skipping chapel three times in the process, and attending parliamentary debates between 3 and 8 October. It was, in Richard Shannon's words, 'a week of intoxication and enchantment' that could not last, for final honours schools were to commence on 9 November (*Literae Humaniores*) and 9 December (*Mathematics*).⁵⁵ Having earned double firsts, he immediately packed to leave for home, and on 1 February 1832 departed for his Grand Tour of Europe in the company of his brother, John Neilson. For the next six months, Gladstone was so full of the historical glories of the Continent that there was no room for mundane matters. These cultural treasures were some consolation for the enactment of the dreaded Reform Bill, which became law on 7 June 1832.

The Newark campaign, 1832

On 6 July, Gladstone returned to his hotel in Milan to find a letter from his friend Lord Lincoln, offering on behalf of his father, the fourth Duke of Newcastle, his support in the upcoming general election in the contest for

SLAVERY.

TO THE
Members and Friends of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, Newark.

An Anonymous writer who styles himself "the Negroes Friend" charges the Wesleyan Ministers with suffering themselves "to be made the Tools of Electorizing Partisanship." If he will allow his name, he will afford them an opportunity of giving a reply, which his assumed title denies them: he will also do himself and his Candidate justice, if he will say when and where Mr. Gladstone "sincerely, openly, and firmly pledged himself to support and expedite by his vote and influence the speedy, and if possible, immediate extinction of Slavery." was it in the Market Place, at a public meeting of the Electors; or did he reply to the questions proposed by the Anti-slavery Committee? If Mr. Gladstone *sincerely, openly, and firmly* pledged himself to the immediate extinction of Slavery in a private room in the Clinton Arms Inn, HE OUGHT NOT TO BE BELIEVED, because, in his last printed Address to the Electors of Newark, he first attempts to defend Slavery from Scripture authority, then admits that it ought to be abolished! but expresses his decided opposition to immediate emancipation, fearing that it would be followed with "a relapse into deeper debasement, if not—bloodshed and internal war."

Mr. Gladstone's Father is deeply interested in the continuance of Slave Property: two years ago he published a letter to Sir Robert Peel, (Baldwin and Cradock, 1830,) with the intimation of proving that Sugar cannot be cultivated in the West Indies without Slavery, and that Parliament ought not to interfere with the West India Planters—connect (to say the least) the doubtful expressions of the Son with the following decisive statements of the Father, and judge for yourself, whether, on the important question of Slavery, W. G. Gladstone, Esq. is "justly entitled to your UTMOST CONFIDENCE."

In this pamphlet Mr. Gladstone says, page 96, "I have a considerable vested interest in plantations and IN THE PEOPLE WHO CULTIVATE THEM" in two of the Colonies. If this expresses his opposition to gradual emancipation, page 14 and 15, "To fix a period for emancipation, or how to decide upon a plan that is intended to lead gradually to such a result, and that within a given time, would, I conceive, be considered as pregnant with danger in our Colonies, that it must immediately lead to their abandonment by the white inhabitants." He is equally opposed to freedom being given to the children of Slaves, and asks, page 19, "would not the adult Slaves be disposed to contend, that their rights or claims to release were alike strong with those of their children," and further, how "those children" "are to be reared and provided for." It cannot be supposed that this will be done by their parents, who are occupied in the service of their owners, or, by means, as at present provided by their masters, who are no longer to have an interest in them: what then is to become of these free children?"

His sentiments as to the *final abolition of Slavery* are thus expressed, page 13, "I require it to be admitted that it is vain to expect, and impossible to depend upon the labour of free Negroes in the field, for the reasons I have already stated; and that without a certain and regular supply of labour, it is equally impossible for the owner to cultivate these Colonies;" and lastly my doubt should remain as to the intention of the writer, in asking, page 19, "is Slavery then to be interminable in our Colonies, or what is the course most to be followed?" I honestly conceive it is not for me to attempt to say when a *system should terminate*, which Almighty God, in the divine wisdom of his over-ruling providence has seen fit to permit in certain climates since the origin and formation of society in this world!" The pamphlet is recommended as a work in which *gradual emancipation* is exploded, and no alternative apparently left to a better mind, but the *immediate abolition of Slavery*, or the rivetting of its chains for ever!!

And yet, in 1829, John Gladstone, Esq. when Member of Parliament voted for gradual emancipation—in 1830 he issued a publication to the world against it—and in 1832 his Son offered himself as a Candidate for a Seat in Parliament, opposing immediate emancipation, PLEDGING HIMSELF TO NOTHING but that the Slave shall work for his freedom and pay for it, and that he is to be prepared by "efficient Christian instruction," when he might know that the Planters generally do, and will punish any Slave that attempts to obtain it; he professes to support something gradual, and he may very probably tell you that he is not responsible for his Father's sentiments!!

"Methodists and Town women, let us explode such foul asphixiation!" I say further, "Beware of such obsequiousness," do not "violate your integrity, and falsify your engagements;" by abandoning your principles; if you have "conscientious scruples" and have been "muzzled by antipropaganda;" you are now called upon to decide.

THE NEGROES REAL FRIEND.

NEWARK, DEC. 4th. 1832.
E. Hope, Printer, Newark.

Election handbill from Newark, 1832, attacking Gladstone on the basis of his father's views on slavery.

the borough of Newark-upon-Trent. Gladstone was at once stunned and thrilled, having imagined that he must first spend several years in private study of history, theology, politics and a host of other subjects that would be required for the ripening of a public man. He quickly returned to England, landing on 29 July, and spent the next two weeks in what he termed an 'amphibious state' between candidate and private person.⁵⁶ On 4 August Gladstone received a letter from the Duke and an enclosed request from Edward Smith Godfrey, President of the Red Club and chairman of Gladstone's election committee, for an address to the borough constituents. He immediately sat down to prepare one, which was printed on Monday 6 August, and finally published in the *Nottingham Journal* on 11 August.

TO THE ELECTORS OF NEWARK.

GENTLEMEN,

If the confidence of success, with which I last addressed you, had been equal to my sanguinities, it would have received it from the subsequent and continual increase of your assurances of support.

I look forward eagerly to the period, now so near, when you will have further means of ascertaining my political sentiments in public, and of judging for yourselves, whether my anticipations of victory have been otherwise than just.

I have to advert to a planned speech, "The Negroes Real Friend," from report, not to the matter it contains, but to the estimable body it addresses; and from which it is my pride to receive a support, not only influential and extensive, but further valuable, because given upon strictly Christian principles.

As regards the pamphlet to which it alludes, I am, in the first place, prepared to show, that by applying to emancipation generally objections aimed at certain particular plans, and to the slave as unqualified by religion, statements referring to his natural condition, it is actually attempts to add a conclusion, directly opposed to the public policy, which Mr. Gladstone gave his Parliamentary Vote in 1832.

I submit that even were it otherwise, the only questions for you to consider, were whether any professions are antislavery, and whether you have the means of expiating me, if I betray them. I am bound by my own deliberations, and by those of no other man.

Other placards have been circulated, stating—

I. That my family have purchased seats in Parliament.

II. That they have voted against the measure introduced there to benefit the slave.

III. That they "own all they possess" to Slavery.

Gentlemen, these statements, one and all are—
FALSE.

I am sorry to have to add, that these placards, circulated and signed by persons whom I believe to be honest, had been published without the printer's name, or it had been cut off: for which each of these persons was liable by law to a penalty of £20. And further: that by thus destroying the means which the law provides, for preventing the publication of libellous matter, they gave you an opportunity of judging, what was THEIR OWN opinion, of the nature of the statements they were spreading.

As regards this circulation of *false matter* in an *illegal* manner, it must it would be ridiculous to suppose that it is unmanly: but it is neither the one nor the other, to deplore, that this violation of the law should have been committed in the name of Religion.

I shall answer to more such attacks, till they are answered once for all upon the merits; and I am much mistaken unless it shall be found, that this unparliamentary conduct, not only betokens enormous weakness, but will injure any cause which may be considered with its friendship. It will fall however upon my faithful friends, I will dissent from no honest principle.

I submit, that I have founded my principle on the authority of Scripture, and if any man can drive me from that ground, I will never attempt to occupy any other.

This principle is, let emancipation go hand in hand with fitness to enjoy freedom: let fitness be promoted and accelerated by every possible means.

I deplore the introduction of Slavery: I deplore its continuance: I desire its extinction: but I complain that the *unprepared abolition* which some persons among you desire, though it might be *immediate*, would be neither permanent nor efficient: but, to the utter ruin of the Slaves—to the sorrow of their real friends—to the confusion of their pitied owners—would prove more blighting than a shadow, and more empty than a name.

Such has ever been, such is, and such I trust shall be, my language. Such it was "in a private room at the Clinton Arms," such it was, when it was addressed from the window to three times the number of persons who attended the "public meeting of the Electors;" and such I hope it will be, when on Tuesday I attend the Electors in public, duly and heartily consoled, and attend and answer questions, not emanating from an irresponsible and self-constituted body.

Meanwhile I cannot forget, that the English Factory Owners are permitted to grow up in almost as great ignorance and delusion of heart, as the West Indian Negroes.

Nay, that the Irish, say too often, the English poor, are far less justly supplied with the necessities and comforts of life.

Nor, that nearly four-fifths of the cotton goods we all consume, are the produce of *other slaves*, reared under a system far more rigorous than our own.

Should the slave question therefore be neglected: God forbid! but why do these persons study to exclude others from sharing your attention?

Why do they not remind you, that we are at present, by aggressive utterly unauthorized, utterly unprovoked, against our ancient friends the Dutch, "insulting the national guilt of counting the horrors of a general war; its bloodshed and its bereavements—its waste of life, and the means of life?"

Gentlemen, I see in their conduct the symptoms of despair. Scruples are cast away as difficulties intrude upon them. They know the warmth with which you support those truly English and constitutional principles which I have the honour to hold—they know the preponderating strength of our position, and the fidelity with which they will be kept. And I for my part know, that you will wait to hear my answers to any objections which may be raised on the score of emancipation: that you will reject with scorn the brief and overdone pretensions which more debating orators would hold out: that you will remember your independence of the institutions of your country and the principles of your forefathers, and in so doing effectually promote the permanent progress of your country.

In the prospect of a speedy and a triumphant meeting with you,

I remain, Gentlemen,
Your obliged and faithful Servant,
W. E. GLADSTONE.

Newark, Saturday, Dec. 8, 1832.
S. AND C. RIDGE, PRINTERS, NEWARK.

Gladstone's response, attacking those that slaves should be educated to be able to prove their fitness to use freedom responsibly.

As a young man just out of university, unknown to the electorate and running against a strong slate of candidates, he was unsure what to say to his prospective constituents. First, he reminded them of 'a warm and conscientious attachment to our Government as a limited Monarchy, and to the Union of our Church and State'—clearly throughout the 1830s, this high ideal was the *sine qua non* of Gladstone's politics and, in his mind, the source of 'numberless blessings' to the nation. Also consistent with his general approach was an appeal to 'facts', with 'abstract principles' only useful in 'subservience' to them. His only mention of slavery was in a general listing of positions: the 'alleviation' of public burdens, the defence of Irish establishments, a 'dignified and impartial' foreign policy, the

‘amelioration’ of conditions of the labouring classes, and ‘the adjustment of our Colonial Interests’, providing for ‘moral advancement and further legal protection of our fellow-subjects in slavery’.⁵⁷ All the elements of this personal declaration were platitudinous enough, lightly expressed and the small portion on slavery was consistent with his final Oxford Union address of 1831. In Gladstone’s mind, however, the primary issue was Reform, and how this might affect the Church of England.

Gladstone was surprised, then, when on 14 August the Agency Anti-Slavery Committee published an advertisement that included his name in Schedule A – as a candidate for Parliament, whose ‘past conduct, or present professions, or admitted personal interest in the question’ had convinced the committee that the candidate would not support immediate abolition.⁵⁸ This was true enough, and consistent with Gladstone’s Oxford Union speech, but only implied in his declaration of 4 August. The advertisement further confused the issue by indicating that Schedule A ‘contains, as a matter of course, all who are known to be slave proprietors’. The Whig incumbent, Serjeant Wilde, was listed with those who were recommended ‘with perfect confidence’ for those desiring ‘immediate abolition’.⁵⁹ The listing of Gladstone in Schedule A left room for some confusion regarding the reasons for his inclusion. None of the Newark constituents were likely to know anything of his obscure Oxford speech, with all its careful distinctions and clear call for ‘compulsory manumission’, but many would have read – long before he first arrived in Newark at the end of September – that he was ‘a Liverpool merchant’ and a Tory with ‘considerable commercial experience’, neither of which was true, but which suggested a West Indian connection.⁶⁰ ‘All I can say’, he recorded in his diary, ‘is, God help the poor slaves, whose interests I fear will be torn in pieces between the contending parties’.⁶¹

Even before the Agency Anti-Slavery Committee’s advertisement appeared, some constituents were confused about Gladstone’s

opinions regarding slavery. In a letter to Godfrey forwarded to Gladstone, Francis Eggleston identified the political ambiguity of the candidate’s statement – ‘the adjustment of our Colonial interests, with measures for the moral advancement and further legal protection of our fellow subjects in slavery’. ‘Could I be informed by you’, Eggleston wrote, ‘whether Mr. Gladstone intends their *continuance in slavery*? Or will he not only advance their morals, protect their rights, but vote for (upon proper restrictions) *their emancipation from slavery*?’⁶² ... That was the question.

Gladstone had included some account of his views on emancipation in an earlier draft, but had deleted them. He sat down immediately to pen a more thorough record of his opinions on the slavery question and what should be done about it. In this first, careful exposition of his views on slavery, two fundamental characteristics mark a middle ground not quite acceptable to the immediate abolitionist or the West Indian planter.⁶³ Gladstone believed that in dealing with an issue so beset with ‘prejudice and misapprehension’, which mingled conflicting goods in Christian truth, historical precedent, legal obligation and human rights, that an open and unbiased search for the truth was the necessary foundation for successfully resolving the difficulty. ‘In my soul and conscience’, he had written a few days earlier, ‘as I shall answer at the day of judgment, I do not feel that I have any bias on the question. ... I think I could account for it intelligibly enough to any moderate person’.⁶⁴ When Gladstone perceived abolitionists treating the matter with ‘levity’, or as merely a matter of politics, he was disgusted.⁶⁵ If, on the other hand, they approached the issue as a solemn duty and with some recognition of conflicting claims, he was inclined to listen and even cooperate. This explains in part why he so valued the work of William Wilberforce and Buxton, and, in this case, why he was ready to so openly and fully answer Eggleston – whose premise assumed that Gladstone might vote for emancipation – ‘upon proper restrictions’. This was the essence of

Gladstone's position. It was not the goal of the abolitionists he disliked, but rather the simplistic moral terms in which they often cast the debate.

The second essential characteristic for Gladstone in approaching the slavery issue was

The greater evil, 'which no emancipation of itself can remove, and which immediate emancipation' would 'inevitably perpetuate', was the low moral condition of the slave, which was the reason he did not favour immediate emancipation.

the 'law of humanity', rooted in the writers of antiquity and confirmed by Scripture. Thus, after attempting to remove any bias, he makes 'the first question to be answered' – 'Is the holding an individual in slavery in itself a sin?' To determine the answer, he argued, 'we must of course repair to Scripture'. If scripture condemns slavery as a sin, there is no option but to 'emancipate immediately and universally'. In Gladstone's judgment, slavery was not necessarily a sin, and thus the issue of slavery could not be resolved by the simple solution of immediate abolition.⁶⁶ In the absence of scriptural condemnation, he argued that Britain's policy should be guided by 'the interests of the parties concerned', temporal, yes, but mainly 'those higher interests, which they possess in common with ourselves, as our brethren in all the features of our conditions'. Remarkably, Gladstone considered the interest of 'the people themselves, and of their owners, to be identical', in that their ultimate goal should be spiritual health and restoration. As improbable as this may now sound, the combination of his classical education and literal reading of scripture led him to conclude, in the happy phrase of David Bebbington, that 'Aristotle and the Bible spoke with one voice'.⁶⁷ Inequality was both natural and good. In a private note of 1830, Gladstone concluded that 'the natural law of humanity' was that some 'are to rule, others to obey, the wellbeing of the whole meanwhile remains the end in order to whose

attainment the parts are thus disposed'.⁶⁸ To his mind, it was 'pretty clear that the abstract form of freedom' was not 'absolutely a legitimate object of desire or pursuit'. The 'object to be desired' was not 'universal freedom of action, which obviously would do him harm if his will be depraved and generally inclined to what is wrong'.⁶⁹

Gladstone admitted that there was 'unquestionably' a 'great and alarming evil in the condition of the West Indian

slaves', but believed it was mainly a moral evil. In addressing the physical condition of the enslaved – and trusting too much on the testimony of eyewitnesses – he argued that 'in point of food, clothing, means of acquiring property, care in sickness, and general treatment', the condition of West Indian slaves was '*very decidedly* superior to that of the labouring classes' of England. Gladstone made it clear that he was not 'imputing any extraordinary benevolence to the owners', merely observing the actual physical result of the economic interest of the planters. Gladstone readily admitted that enslaved men and women had been mistreated, and that 'gross maltreatment' would almost certainly happen in the future. The only way to solve that problem was through 'emancipation', with further 'legal protections' in the meantime.

Gladstone's entire conception of politics, which included the issue of slavery, was founded on the exclusive nature of Christian truth, for he did not think it likely that 'the difficulties of political relations' could ever be 'surmounted except by practical Christianity'.⁷⁰ The greater evil, 'which no emancipation of itself can remove, and which immediate emancipation' would 'inevitably perpetuate', was the low moral condition of the slave, which was the reason he did not favour immediate emancipation. Gladstone lauded both 'private benevolence' and 'legislative enactment' for efforts at 'religious instruction', but

he believed that the government – and hence, the country – were to blame. The country had been ‘wicked’ in ‘proposing Christianity as a nation’ and ‘having embodied it in both the legislature and laws’, while continuing ‘to bring these poor people into bondage and hold them in it’, while withholding from them ‘that transcendent blessing which it was in our power to have communicated’. It was the ‘wicked example’ of Britons that kept the slaves in a ‘state of animal existence’. Until ‘that slumber is dispelled’, Gladstone wrote, ‘I do not think it possible that he can be made sensible of the high capabilities and destinies of his being’ that would lead to ‘purely voluntary industry and good conduct’. Until a Christian principle of action was provided, he believed that ‘emancipation would be the sorest evil which could be inflicted on the slave’. His view of slavery as expressed for the electors of New-ark was consistent with his general appreciation of the ‘natural law’ of politics, confirmed in scripture, that ‘the right to govern’ could only lie ‘where the capacity to govern’ was also found.⁷¹

This was not merely a self-serving explanation of the situation that existed, though clearly he was speaking from a position of privilege as one who had inherited that providential ‘right it govern’. More importantly, for Gladstone, unlike his father, it was a starting point for a solution that was in reach. Both sides in the debate reflected good and evil principles – the West Indian interest mixing selfishness with ‘lawful caution’; the abolitionists combining ‘fervid benevolence’ with imperial ‘recklessness and indifference to the rights of property’. Gladstone believed that, if both sides worked ‘in good earnest’, there were still ‘remarkable facilities for raising the Negroes to the condition of an enlightened and Christian population’. He was optimistic that ‘a comprehensive scheme of education’ was still practicable. Sceptics might consider this cant or self-delusion, but it was more than that. Gladstone knew the Christian faith and character of his father, and of the planter class

more generally, and believed that this ‘body of Christian men’ would respond favourably to a ‘practical scheme for genuine religious education’ that might eventually result in emancipation. He also could see on the horizon an opportunity for himself and others to actually develop such a plan.⁷²

Gladstone believed that justice demanded compensation for the planters, and his father expected him and Tom to serve as his factotums in London, reporting on developments among the various committees and groups representing the West India interest, and determining the temperature of the political debate. This could have created a moral dilemma, but the main work of the committees was to determine whether or not to support the Abolition of Slavery Bill, with its £20 million in compensation, and, if so, how to apportion it among the planters. On these matters Gladstone agreed with his father. The slave trade originated before any West Indian colonisation, it was sanctioned by British law and pressed upon the government ‘by the manufacturing and trading classes’ of the country. Had not Colonial Secretary Lord Dartmouth in 1775 required the trade in slaves, refusing to ‘allow the colonies to check or discourage in any degree a traffic so beneficial to the nation’?⁷³ But Gladstone was clear about the primary reason he supported the bill. Even a just compensation to the planters would not atone for an emancipation that was ‘ruinous to the Negroes’. The ‘true object’ was to emancipate them neither sooner nor later than the moment at which emancipation would be ‘beneficial’ to both the slave and the planter. Because slavery developed from an ‘unfortunate combination of circumstances’, and was, like war, ‘evil in its origin’, it was impossible to be ‘at once got rid of’.⁷⁴ It nevertheless provided ‘remarkable advantages for ensuring’ the ‘blessings of systematic and universal instruction’. The abolitionists, Gladstone argued, ‘wish to change the name, I the nature’ of that state of society. ‘I want effectual emancipation’.⁷⁵



The first session of the new House of Commons following the Great Reform Act, 5 February 1833 (painted by Sir George Hayter, © National Portrait Gallery, London)

Gladstone's position, then, in 1832–33, was to support emancipation with a period of apprenticeship, with 'the opportunity of manumission' granted to those who showed 'industry and good conduct', then to wait for a 'general diffusion of knowledge' that would 'put the Negroes in the condition as to religion of the people of this country. In his optimistic view, this was 'no difficult nor distant object'. If slavery then did not 'die a natural death, let it die a forced one by direct interposition of the Legislature'. He had called for 'compulsory manumission' in his speech to the Oxford Union in 1831, and it was still his position during the debates of 1833.

Godfrey, who knew that the issue of slavery would be foremost with many, especially among the Wesleyans, was right to press Gladstone for clarification. From that point forward, Gladstone's tact, openness and goodwill carried the day. He began his canvass on 25 September 1832. A handful of women were angry about his position on slavery, and many

Wesleyans were hesitant to offer support. But that evening Gladstone met privately with thirty or forty of them. Their manner he found 'really gratifying', because they 'behaved as voters ought, as men who had a duty to perform, and commands of conscience to follow'. He was surprised that they had not heard the accounts of the Anti-Slavery Society. 'They were candid and fair beyond anything', he wrote to his father, 'and not one of them left the room without leaving us his promise'.⁷⁶

Gladstone's Whig opponent Wilde, who had made slavery *the* issue of the campaign, made frequent use of John Gladstone's pamphlet in the process.⁷⁷ In his address at the Clinton Arms of 9 October 1832, Gladstone devoted half of his message to the issue, yet without directly responding to his father's own particular views. He repeated his appeal to the 'paramount authority of scripture', gently reminded voters that 'fitness' should be 'the condition of emancipation' and touted a 'universal and efficient system of Christian instruction' for West Indian slaves, as a preparation for emancipation. Knowing that some were for immediate emancipation, he emphasised his common ground with them: 'We are agreed, that both the physical and the moral bondage

of the slave are to be abolished. The question is as to the order and the order only: now Scripture attacks the moral evil before the temporal one, and the temporal through the moral one, and I am content with the order Scripture has established.⁷⁸ Wilde continued to attack Gladstone with *A Statement of Facts*, and the abolitionists continued to appeal to the Wesleyan community for ‘the immediate extinction of Colonial Slavery’.⁷⁹ One man opposed him because he did ‘not go far enough about slavery’, another because, as he wrote to his father, of ‘*the situation in which I stood! We can do without them*’.⁸⁰ And Gladstone was right. At the declaration on 14 December, he topped the poll: Gladstone 887, fellow Tory Handley 798, and the Whig Wilde 726. What was perceived as wise moderation, even among Wesleyans and others who favoured emancipation, won the day at Newark.

Gladstone’s maiden speech, 3 June 1833

Gladstone’s maiden speech in Parliament on 3 June 1833 was not a major policy statement, but it was notable for two reasons. It was foremost a spirited defence of his father, who on 14 May had been publicly named by Colonial Secretary Lord Howick as the proprietor of the Vreed-en-Hoop estate in Demerara, where, it was alleged, slaves had been worked to death in proportion to increases in sugar production. Gladstone argued that Howick had erred in both honour and in fact. He should not have made a statement impugning John Gladstone’s ‘moral character’ without notice, particularly as two members of his family sat in the House. Notice would have given Gladstone the opportunity of marshalling his facts, for he believed that the best information was derived from the reports emanating directly from the plantations themselves, along with reports from various travellers who had witnessed management of the estates first-hand. ‘What man’s character would not be affected if he should see, from the reports from his estate, that while the sugar cultivation was increasing his slaves

were dying off in equal proportion, and if, under such circumstances, he should continue the same system of management?’ In terms of defending his father’s honour, Gladstone received a sympathetic hearing from both friends and opponents, who considered family loyalty as being, in Richard Shannon’s phrase, ‘on the level of a cardinal virtue’.⁸¹

The speech also served as an announcement to the House, and to a lesser extent to the public at large, that a formidable young Tory was among them, full of facts, and fire and an uncommon grasp of detail.⁸² Not only was Howick’s assertion wrong, that the mortality rate on Vreed-en-Hoop was 14 per cent – it was about 2 per cent. Even then, the figures there were not representative. On Mon Repos, in 1825, the estate produced 1,200 pounds of sugar per enslaved worker, which according to Howick’s ‘own admission’ was the ‘lowest average for any estate’, but in fact when his father had acquired the property in 1828, ‘250 were immediately added to the gang’, which materially altered the calculations. As to punishments on Vreed-en-Hoop, Gladstone had a trump card in his pocket, a letter from the estate, dated 20 April 1833, which indicated that there had been exactly one punishment during the current year. This all demonstrated that ‘honourable and respectable branches of his family’ which owned West Indian property ‘were not inattentive to the wants, the wishes, the feelings, and the interests, of the negro population’.

When the leading Irish MP Daniel O’Connell spoke of ‘the blood of the negro’ crying ‘to God from the ground’, Gladstone admitted that if there were genuine ‘recklessness of human life’ among the planters, this would ‘deprive them of the right to appeal to justice’. When Buxton argued that the number of males and females in Demerara was equal, Gladstone had the figures ready to disprove it, and when Buxton boldly challenged the planters – ‘Give me the quantity of sugar, and I will give you the decrease of life’, Gladstone was happy to apply his ‘theorem’. In ‘St Vincent

there was an increase of 122 persons in twelve years: in Santa Lucia there was a decrease of 1,962. In Santa Lucia, the produce of sugar had been 6 cwt. per man, so how much ought that in St Vincent's to be? He had not worked out the problem, but the answer' would be 'very different indeed from the fact, which gave no less than 10 cwt. per man'. Gladstone had an answer for every criticism, speaking to specific cases in Demerara, St Vincent, Santa Lucia, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados, each disproving careless allegations against the 'West-Indian interest'.

Even for the historian attempting to understand the nature of a remote line of reasoning, there is something faintly ludicrous in responding to the question of freedom or continued slavery for 800,000 men, women and children with updated information just arrived from one estate and illuminating statistics regarding the number of hogsheads of sugar produced in particular colonies according to mathematical 'theorems'. But if one is unwilling to recognise that all matters in Britain in that period, from slavery to trade to labour, were debated in the context of the concrete and with a deep suspicion of the abstract, it is virtually impossible to understand the terms of the debate, or the views of the abolitionists themselves, making it difficult to fully appreciate the magnitude of their achievement in shepherding the bill through the legislature. Why were so many of them, including Buxton, willing to support gradual emancipation; why were so many of the petitioners willing to qualify their abolitionist appeal; and why were they willing to support compensation for the planters? O'Connell himself appealed to the million and a half signatures that had been gathered on petitions against slavery, and argued that Howick and others had 'proved indubitably' the case of the anti-slavery advocates. The 'way' in which he came at the evidence was the testimony before the committee regarding the condition of the slaves and the testimony of those who wished to disprove it. And in refuting planter claims regarding

excessive loss of life among the slaves, O'Connell 'would only state the fact' for every 1,720 persons in the West Indies, there were 65 deaths, while in England the number was only 31 – 'those were the facts which no man would deny'.⁸³ Howick and O'Connell and Buxton might vigorously disagree with Gladstone about the validity of compensation, but they did not dispute that it was a proper point of discussion which required supporting facts. Appeals to 'liberty as a natural right' were secondary, even among most radicals. For Gladstone, the weighty issue of slavery was only one aspect of the condition of the world, good in God's conception, marred by the sinfulness of humanity but redeemable through Christ.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The question of abolishing slavery in 1833 was not framed to suit the twenty-first century. Even staunch abolitionists could then speak in terms of emancipation in the sugar and coffee colonies 'so as not to destroy them'. Both abolitionists and slaveholders professed religious motives and generally cooperated in philanthropy. Nor were West India merchants 'systematically contested in any moral or social reaction against their involvement in slavery'.⁸⁵ Most observers weighed the complexity of the sugar issue, in which commercial, imperial, philanthropic, and religious considerations mingled, 'confounding and crossing each other and confusing legislature and nation lost in a maze of conflicting interests and contending emotions'.⁸⁶ Even in considering the possibility of freeing enslaved children, John Gladstone could not imagine continuing sugar cultivation in such circumstances, for there would be too much insecurity of labour at harvest time, and the demand at home would be too great. The *Star*, like young Gladstone, however, believed that education might work. If the children were properly trained, they would 'make free labourers, just like the natives of all countries, if duly recompensed'.⁸⁷ Even Buxton

and ‘many senior abolitionists’ were hostile to ‘wild and enthusiastic immediatism’.⁸⁸ So there was room for disagreement in British society in 1833, just as in British families, regarding the best way for dealing with the issue of slavery.

John and William Gladstone agreed on many things about slavery. They believed that it was sanctioned by history and justified by the exclusive truth of the Christian gospel. Neither understood slavery to be necessarily sinful, but recognised that it had been supported by legal statute and encouraged by the government, and thus in justice required compensation with the abolition of slavery. Both supported amelioration of the condition of the slaves, consistent with Canning’s resolutions of 1823, which included what Taylor calls ‘impossibly restrictive caveats’: the ‘safety of the colonies’ and the ‘interests of private property’.⁸⁹ They both recognised the enervating nature of sugar production, but considered it less brutal than many forms of factory work in England or Ireland, and more conducive to a generally happy life. They admitted that violence against slaves did occur – but saw this as consistent with the ‘brutality, murder, plunder and

still retain the capacity of suffering’, and all for the sake of torrents of wealth flooding into England.⁹¹ He was also committed to an unbiased investigation of emancipation (however contested the possibility of this may now appear), and to a respectful hearing for those of similar mind. When some Demeraran deputies wished Gladstone to hold back petitions for gradual emancipation, he demurred, feeling that it would be ‘disrespectful to the petitioners’.⁹² Too, he supported compulsory manumission. Whereas his father would not ‘attempt to say when a system should terminate which Almighty God in the Divine wisdom of his overruling providence has seen fit to permit’, William had a clear idea as to when and how it should be done.⁹³ Those enslaved should be freed when their moral condition had been raised through Christian education outside the control of the planters. If this proved unsuccessful, he then believed that slavery should be abolished through legislation. John Gladstone vaguely spoke of a distant possibility of emancipation, though he had no idea how it might be brought about. During the Newark campaign, William disagreed with his father regarding ‘the difficulties of emancipation’

and was already thinking about effective means of preparing for it.⁹⁴

Shortly after his maiden speech and deep into his lobbying work on behalf of the planters of

The question of abolishing slavery in 1833 was not framed to suit the twenty-first century. Even staunch abolitionists could then speak in terms of emancipation in the sugar and coffee colonies ‘so as not to destroy them’.

cruelty’ present in all societies, including England’.⁹⁰ They also believed that those instances were greatly exaggerated, particularly following the Orders in Council of 1831, which had made any slave owner who ill-treated his slaves liable to prosecution.

William Gladstone’s views were, however, distinctive in a number of respects. First, he was troubled by the dehumanisation of the slave system, rooted in the ‘original sin’ of the slave trade, and believed it to be a fair claim to emancipation. The planters make them ‘slaves of our lust ... incompetent to enjoyment they

six colonies, Gladstone met William Wilberforce, the leader of the campaign against the slave trade in the 1790s and 1800s, for the first time, introduced by his son. In arranging the meeting, Henry Wilberforce reported that his father wished him to tell Gladstone he knew ‘of a very kind proposal wh. he made about me and am particularly obliged to him’.⁹⁵ This was a poignant moment, for the great abolitionist had once been friendly with John and Anne Gladstone until their falling out over the Demerara Revolt of 1823 and the founding of the Anti-Slavery Society.⁹⁶ Nevertheless,

during their meeting, Wilberforce asked after his father, and ‘how is your sweet Mother?’ Gladstone listened to the exalted abolitionist pray with his family, and must have reflected on the troubling religious divisions within his own family, particularly over the issue of slavery. It was a touching scene, with the gentle, generous old hero showing undue kindness to an earnest young man just entering public life. Wilberforce was in many respects the kind of public man Gladstone wanted to be – rigorous in self-examination (and a fervent keeper of a diary), serious, generous in spirit and in philanthropy, and optimistic about the future. Four days later, Wilberforce was dead. After attending his funeral on 3 August, Gladstone’s thoughts turned ‘solemn, particularly about the slaves’.⁹⁷ He deeply admired Wilberforce – for his stand against slavery, for his reflective life, for his evangelical Churchmanship – ‘almost purely an individual case’ among Tories, he thought.⁹⁸ And the sincerity of his feelings for Wilberforce were clearly understood by the family, who consulted him on West Indian questions while preparing the testamentary biography of their father. Upon receiving a copy of *The Life of William Wilberforce* from his sons, Gladstone acknowledged what an example he was for a man in public life, and observed that on the issue of slavery, he had never regarded Wilberforce’s conduct with ‘any feeling but admiration’.⁹⁹ The irony is inescapable. In his mercantile roots and family loyalty, Gladstone was his father’s son, but with respect to religious sensibility, personal habit and method, he had far more in common with Wilberforce.

So where did Gladstone stand in 1833? Was he an apologist for slavery, or an abolitionist? He was a first-time member of parliament with little influence, who rarely spoke. He finally rose to prominence in the early 1840s and continued to shape the contours of British politics for more than half a century. It is unnecessary to recount the long list of his achievements, but generally they were on the side of the oppressed, including British workers and

prostitutes, Africans trafficked into slavery, the Irish generally and religious minorities in Bulgaria and Armenia. As he gained more practical experience of the world, more and more of his efforts were designed to promote greater freedoms and less violence globally. Henry Manning, who had been both his intimate friend and religious antagonist, reflected on Gladstone’s ‘boyish ... admiration of Canning’ during that first Newark election. But thereafter he reckoned that his ‘whole career’ had been ‘for the people, always widening out’.¹⁰⁰

When Gladstone re-read his speech on the Slavery Abolition Bill ‘at some later period’, he regretted his early illiberal opinion and was thankful for the ‘enormous and blessed change of opinion’ on ‘the subject of negro slavery’.¹⁰¹ And by 1878, fully understanding his own complicity in resisting immediate abolition, he named ‘the Abolition of Slavery’ as the first great historical example where ‘popular judgment’ was ‘more just than that of the higher orders’.¹⁰² What Gladstone had not learned at Oxford, he later observed, was to properly value ‘the imperishable and inestimable principles of human liberty’.¹⁰³ He regretted his youthful Tory views, and subsequently changed both his opinions and his policies.

While some today hold him morally responsible for slavery, others are wondering why a speech from 1833 is being wielded against him. When Brent Council in 2020 raised the possibility of renaming Gladstone Park due to the family links to slavery, the Bulgarian Ambassador to the United Kingdom reminded the mayors of London and Brent that Gladstone was still a hero in Bulgaria for supporting their 1876 uprising against the ‘Ottoman system of slavery’.¹⁰⁴ Gladstone’s maiden speech was naïve in some respects, and some of his views unpalatable 200 years on, but his humanity was even then beginning to widen out.

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- 1 'The Slave Trade and the British Empire: An Audit of Commemoration in Wales', Task and Finish Group Report and Audit, 26 November 2020, pp. 8–9.
- 2 Thus, when Gladstone's name was removed from a block of student housing at the University of Liverpool in 2022, it was re-named for Dorothy Kuya, a Black, racial activist and long-time member of the Communist Party of Britain. Leading the small resistance was Dr. David Jeffery, senior lecturer in British politics at the University of Liverpool. 'Gladstone should be celebrated, not cancelled' CapX, 11 June 2022, <https://capx.co/gladstone-should-be-celebrated-not-cancelled/>.
- 3 Among all these early articles, only one was explicitly devoted to William Gladstone's position. But the title promises rather more than the article delivers, as it caricatures a single speech and misleadingly asserting that he was 'entangled' in his father's plantation enslavement. Jonathan Smith and Paul Lashmar, 'How William Gladstone defended his father's role in slavery', *The Observer*, 19 August 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/19/how-william-gladstone-defended-his-fathers-role-in-slavery#:~:text=In%20later%20life%20Gladstone%20appeared,dying%20off%20in%20large%20numbers>.
- 4 All references, unless otherwise noted, are from the widely disseminated Associated Press article by Bert Wilkinson, 'Descendants of a British owner of slaves in Guyana apologize as Caribbean nation seeks reparations', ABC News, 25 August 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/descendants-british-own-er-slaves-guyana-apologize-caribbean-seeks-102569708>.
- 5 On 'spit shining their halos', see Esther Krakue on Talk TV, 22 August 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIrFHoNJ92g&t=254s>.
- 6 'Family of former British PM apologises for links to slavery', *Al Jazeera*, 27 August 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/27/family-of-former-british-pm-apologises-for-links-to-slavery>
- 7 'Jamaicans call for Gladstone slavery reparations', BBC News, 26 August 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/world/2023-08-26-jamaicans-call-for-gladstone-slavery-reparations/>.
- 8 22 June 1894, in John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (eds.), *The Prime Minister's Papers: W.E. Gladstone*, 4 vols. (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971–81), 1:39 [hereafter, PMP]. Biographers writing near the time of Gladstone's death recognised how difficult it was 'for those who have been born into the freer air of later years to realise how men of tender conscience and scrupulous honour could ever have defended its policy or apologised for' slavery. . . . 'while everyone can see the evil which is condemned by all, it is but few who perceive it as long as it receives the common sanction'. Alfred F. Robbins, *The Early Public Life of W. E. Gladstone*, (Methuen, 1894), pp. 182–83.
- 9 William Gladstone to John Gladstone, 5 Aug. 1836, Gladstone's Library, Glynne-Gladstone Papers [hereafter GG] MS 224/174, f. 359; Thomas Fowell Buxton to William Gladstone, 16 September 1837, British Library, Gladstone Papers [hereafter GP] Add. MS 44355, f. 252; Samuel Wilberforce to William Gladstone, 20 April 1838, in A. R. Ashwell, *Life of Samuel Wilberforce*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (John Murray, 1883), 1:133–35.
- 10 Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the abolition of Slavery* (Vintage, 2020), pp. 89, 248–9.
- 11 Richard Huzzey, 'Free Trade, Free Labour, and Slave Sugar in Victorian Britain', *Historical Journal* 53 (June 2010), p. 366.
- 12 Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture: 'Habits of Heart and Mind'* (Oxford 2015), pp. 39–40.
- 13 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* [1944] (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2022), p. 263.
- 14 Nicholas Draper, 'The Fall of Slavery: statues, symbols and social contention', *History and Policy*, 10 June 2020, (<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/rss>).
- 15 Rachel Lang, Katie Donington, Keith McClelland, Nicholas Draper, and Catherine Hall, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Draper served as Director of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (2016–19), with Catherine Hall as

- lead investigator. Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery [hereafter LBS], <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>
- 16 Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 212.
- 17 Padraic X. Scanlan, *Slave Empire: How Slavery Built Modern Britain* (Robinson, 2020), p. 330.
- 18 Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (Vintage, 2020), p. 311. See pp. 248–9 for a more direct condemnation of Gladstone.
- 19 ‘At the end of the day’, writes Jessica Marie Johnson, ‘history is actually about social justice. . . . The battle is . . . about how we relate to each other, and it’s also about how we are laying the foundation for a new generation of activists’. Julie Scharper, ‘Black Beyond Data’, Johns Hopkins University HUB, 2 June 2022, <https://hub.jhu.edu/2022/06/02/black-beyond-data-jessica-marie-johnson/>.
- 20 Ryan Smith, ‘Why Black Twitter is ‘On Fire’ after Queen Elizabeth II’s Death’, *Newsweek*, 10 September 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/why-black-twitter-fire-after-queen-elizabeth-second-death-1741410>; Call for submissions – Women in Power: Female Agency in the Nineteenth Century, The Victorianist: British Association for Victorian Studies Post-graduates, 26 January 2021, <https://royalhistsoc.org/?s=women+in+power>; Trushula Patel, ‘Two Separate Societies Divided by Color: Race Colonialism and *Bridgerton*’, *Perspectives on History*, 9 August 2022, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2022/two-separate-societies-divided-by-color-race-colonialism-and-bridgerton/em>.
- 21 ‘LBS, past and present’, 12 June 2020, LBS, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/lbsppt/>. On reparative history, see Catherine Hall, ‘Doing Reparatory History: Bringing ‘race’ and slavery home’, *Race and Class* 60/1 (2018): 3–21.
- 22 Matthew Smith, ‘Looking Forward’, LBS, 12 June 2020, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/lbsppt2>.
- 23 See ‘Change proposed for Vancouver school named after U. K. Prime Minister with Links to Slavery’, 11 June 2020, CBC, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/change-proposed-for-vancouver-school-named-after-u-k-prime-minister-with-links-to-slavery-1.5608483#:~:text=The%20Vancouver%20School%20Board%20to%20ld,the%20community%20and%20the%20school.%22>.
- 24 Trevor Burnard, ‘We must face up to the fact that we’re all implicated in the legacy of slavery’, *Yorkshire Post*, 12 April 2023, <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/columnists/we-must-face-up-to-the-fact-that-were-all-implicated-in-the-legacy-of-slavery-trevor-burnard-4099759>.
- 25 My differences with Quinault in this study relate mainly to interpretation. Among numerous examples, for instance, he reads Gladstone’s confession—that his ‘leading desire was to benefit the cause of those who are now so sorely beset’—as a reference to the planters, which it certainly could be. I read the antecedent to be those who were enslaved, and I think the evidence points in this direction. But it can work both ways. Quinault, ‘Gladstone and Slavery’, *The Historical Journal* 52/2 (2009), p. 368.
- 26 ‘William Gladstone: University of Liverpool to rename building over slavery links’, BBC News, 10 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-52990464>.
- 27 Purba Hossain, ‘A Matter of Doubt and Uncertainty: John Gladstone and the Post-Slavery Framework of Labour in the British Empire’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 50:1, p. 67.
- 28 Taylor, *The Interest*, p. 268.
- 29 The LBS database indicates that Gladstone ‘purchased’ the Belmont Estate (Demerara) in 1803, but it is not clear that his £1,500 interest was anything more than a financial investment—at 6 per cent. S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones: A Family Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 44–45.
- 30 Hossain, ‘A Matter of Doubt and Uncertainty’, pp. 52–82; Richard B. Sheridan, ‘The Condition of the Slaves on the Sugar Plantations of Sir John Gladstone in the Colony of Demerara, 1812–49’, *New West Indian Guide*

- 76 (2002), no.: ¾, Leiden, pp. 243–69; Trevor Burnard and Kit Candlin, ‘Sir John Gladstone and the Debate over the Amelioration of Slavery in the British West Indies in the 1820s’, *Journal of British Studies* (October 2018): 760–782; Burnard and John Coffey are currently preparing a study on ‘John Gladstone, Demerara and 1823’.
- 31 In the world of reparatory history, actor and activist Femi Nylander is free to imagine and say on national television that William ‘used his political power just before he became Prime Minister to basically assure that his father would get a payment of about 20 million’. William Gladstone had no such power in 1833, and would not become prime minister until 1868. ‘Gladstone Family Apologises’. GBNews.com [August 2023]. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPSCTaG7n-w&t=44s>.
- 32 On the complicated details of John Gladstone’s legacy, see Checkland, *The Gladstones*, pp. 375–6, 414–16.
- 33 Robbins, *Early Public Life of Gladstone*, pp. 155–56.
- 34 Reprinted in *Champion*, 2 September 1838, p. 8.
- 35 John Gladstone to William Gladstone, 4 May 1838, GG MS 638, [nf]. On 30 August 1839, John Gladstone informed his son that he meant to actually ‘transfer to us his Demerara properties’, but later evidence suggests that this might not have been done before the estates were sold the following year. 30 August 1839, M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew (eds.), *The Gladstone Diaries and Prime Ministerial Correspondence*, 14 vols. (1968–1994), [hereafter *GD*], 2:623; William Gladstone to his John Gladstone, 31 Dec. 1839, GG 225/126, f. 250
- 36 29 December 1830, *GD*, 1:336.
- 37 Gladstone to Anne M. Gladstone, 5 December 1823, GG MS 394, f. 43.
- 38 Peter J. Jagger, *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician* (Pickwick, 1991), pp. 75–76.
- 39 See, for instance, his reading of ‘Mr. Wilberforce’s admirable speech and several more on the Slave Trade in 1791’, 15 Oct. 1826, *GD*, 1:79; and his ‘long conversation on W. Indies’ with his sister Anne, 11 July 1828, *GD*, 1:189.
- 40 Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 88; E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Gladstone* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), p. 13; Checkland, *The Gladstones*, p. 262; Eugenio Biagini, *Gladstone* (Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 20–21; Quinault, ‘Gladstone and Slavery’, p. 365.
- 41 Quinault, ‘Gladstone and Slavery’, pp. 365–6.
- 42 Especially Basil Hall, *Travels in North America*, British Library, Gladstone Papers [hereafter GP], Add. MS 44722, f. 149; Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the present state of slavery in the West Indies*, GP Add. MS 44793, ff. 30–31; and Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, GP Add. MS 44815, f. 35.
- 43 When friends attempted to tactfully alert the elder Gladstone to his unpopularity in Liverpool following Huskisson’s death, he was puzzled: ‘I am ignorant of any rational reasonable cause why it should be so’. Checkland, *The Gladstones*, p. 233; ‘Beginnings or Incunabula’, 8 July 1892, in PMP 1:20.
- 44 ‘I remember cherishing a hope’, Gladstone wrote late in life, that he would ‘bequeath’ the church he had built at Seaforth in 1815, and ‘that I might live in it’. PMP 1:19.
- 45 8 July 1892, PMP 1:18. ‘So wretched a creature am I that now I have gained my wish I dare not act upon it!’, Gladstone wrote when his father conceded to allow him to give up Mathematics. 9 November 1830, *GD*, 1:329.
- 46 William Gladstone to John Neilson Gladstone, 30 December 1830, in D.C. Lathbury, ed. *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1910), 2: 226. Tom Gladstone’s ‘experiment’ in independence was crushed by this literal understanding of filial obligation. See Checkland, *The Gladstones*, p. 167.
- 47 The most notable of these differences involved John Gladstone’s support ‘for popular representation’ in 1831, while William was making his name at Oxford in frenzied opposition, drafting placards, hawking petitions and delivering the Oxford Union speech of 17 May 1831 that made him famous in Oxford and brought him under the notice of the Duke of Newcastle. W. E. Gladstone to Robertson Gladstone, 26 March 1831, GG MS

568. Later that year, John Gladstone opposed 'sweeping measures', but argued that 'certain changes' in the system of representation were desirable. 'The Liverpool Reformers', *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 24 November 1831, p. 3.
- 48 Quinault, 'Gladstone and Slavery', pp. 365–6; Burnard and Candlin, 'Sir John Gladstone and the Debate over the Amelioration of Slavery in the British West Indies in the 1820s', p. 782.
- 49 29 December 1830, 5–8 January 1831, *GD*, 1:336–37.
- 50 John Gladstone, *A Statement of Facts connected with the Present State of Slavery in the British Sugar and Coffee colonies, and in the United States of America, together with a view of the present situation of the lower classes of the United Kingdom, contained in a letter addressed to the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart.* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1830).
- 51 One of the Majority [William Gladstone], 18 November 1830, *Evening Standard*, p. 1.
- 52 F. H. Doyle, *Reminiscences and Opinions*, 5th ed. (Longmans Green, 1886), p. 114.
- 53 For his notes on the speech, see Add. MS 44649, ff. 29–31.
- 54 Robert Lowe, listening to Gladstone for the first time in this speech, was nevertheless struck by his mastery of the material and 'carefully prepared scheme' for gradual emancipation. A. Patchett Martin, *Life and Letters of Robert Lowe, Viscount Sherbrooke*, 2 vols. (Longmans, Green, 1893), pp. 16–17.
- 55 Richard Shannon, *Gladstone I: 1809–1865* (London, 1982), p. 32.
- 56 Gladstone's account of this period is in *GD*, 1:564–67.
- 57 Robbins, *Early Public Life*, p. 118–19.
- 58 This is not unlike the modern, simplifying social critique that places Gladstone in a category 'requiring examination having been highlighted by campaigners', along with Churchill, Columbus, Peel and the fictional 'Jim Crow'. Ironically, the brief assessment of Gladstone's relation to slavery is fair and balanced. 'The Slave Trade and the British Empire: An Audit of Commemoration in Wales', Task and Finish Group Report and Audit, 26 November 2020, pp. 8–9, 25.
- 59 Robbins, *Early Public Life*, pp. 120–21.
- 60 Robbins, *Early Public Life*, p. 120.
- 61 14 August 1832, *GD*, 1:565.
- 62 Francis Eggleston to Godfrey, 18 August 1832, (copy), GP Add. MS 44352, f. 257.
- 63 All references in the following five paragraphs, unless otherwise cited, are from William Gladstone to Godfrey, 23 August 1832, GP Add. MS 44352, ff. 256–57.
- 64 14 August 1832, *GD*, 1:565.
- 65 13 February 1833, *GD*, 2:10.
- 66 Gladstone expands on the scriptural test in a more fiery, anonymous polemic in the *Liverpool Standard*, in which he directly points to Ephesians vi.9 and Colossians iv.1, emphasising that 'no consideration' could 'justify the continuance in known sin for one moment'. [William Gladstone], 'West India Slavery', *Liverpool Standard*, 5 February 1833, p. 176.
- 67 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 42.
- 68 'On the Principle of Government', 31 May–6 June 1830, Add. MS 44721, f. 4.
- 69 'On the Principle of Government', Add. MS 44721, f. 7.
- 70 'On the Principle of Government', Add. MS 44721, f. 9. This was most likely a nod to William Wilberforce, who had made 'practical Christianity' a household phrase among evangelical churchmen with the popularity of his *A Practical View of Real Christianity* [1797], which Gladstone read in a new edition when it was published in 1829.
- 71 'On the Principle of Government', GP Add. MS 44721, f. 13.
- 72 When Peel appointed him colonial under-secretary in late January 1835, Gladstone was viewed as an ideal candidate, one who 'would give confidence to the West Indian body', and comfort to those concerned with the 'religious and moral condition of the black population'. Quinault interprets this as evidence of Gladstone's identification with his father's views. Yet, within a few days of his appointment, in the midst of the transition and all the business on hand, Gladstone began to develop the West Indian education plan that he had once imagined might do so much good, and which little interested his father. 'West Indian Education', 7 April 1835, GP Add. MS 44724, ff. 4–37; see, too, PMP 2:49–50. In general, Quinault is skeptical of sympathetic interpretations of Gladstone's motives. 'Gladstone and Slavery', pp. 368, 369, 381.

- 73 'Chronology of the Slave Trade, 1585–1775', [ca. 1832–33], GP Add. MS 44793, f. 140; [Notes for speech of 3 June 1833], GP Add. MS 44649, f. 44. This was in keeping with his broader economic theory that the 'richest and most advanced' nation should have colonies, otherwise 'profits being low at home from the great abundance of capital and consequent competition, speculators will transfer their commercial operations to foreign countries where money is more scarce'. [Aug.] 21 [1832], GP Add. MS 44815e, f. 2.
- 74 [W. E. Gladstone], 'West India Slavery'. *Liverpool Standard*, 5 February 1833, p. 176. In his maiden speech, he argued that the slave trade 'unquestionably began in crime, in atrocious crime, and in grievous sin'. 3 June 1833, *Mirror of Parliament*, cited in Robbins, *Early Public Life*, p. 176.
- 75 [untitled mem.] GP Add. MS 44815, f. 67.
- 76 William Gladstone to John Gladstone, 27 September 1832, GG MS 223/12, ff. 29–30.
- 77 On the electoral challenges of the family name, see Douglas Kanter, 'Was All Irish Politics Local? The Portarlington Election of 1832 and the Structure of Politics in 19th-Century Ireland, *Parliamentary History* 33/3 (2014), pp. 448–9.
- 78 'To the Worthy and Independent Electors of the Borough of Newark', 9 October 1832, GP Add. MS 44722, ff. 59–64
- 79 Leonard Posnett, Joseph T. Milner, 'Slavery', 24 November 1832, GP Add. MS 44523.
- 80 William Gladstone to John Gladstone, 8 October 1832, GG MS 223/14, f. 35.
- 81 Shannon, *Gladstone I: 1809–1865*, pp. 45–46. On reception of Gladstone's speech, see, too, Robbins, *Early Public Life*, pp. 177–80. The distinction between Gladstone's loyalty toward his father, and the readiness of Charles Gladstone to dismiss him out of hand as 'vile. . . greedy and domineering', are striking and reflective of the reparatory turn in examining the past. Jonathan Smith and Paul Lashmar, 'William Gladstone: family of former British PM to apologise for links to slavery', *The Observer*, 19 August 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/19/william-gladstone-family-of-former-british-pm-to-apologise-for-links-to-slavery>.
- 82 3 June 1833, Hansard, *Parl. Debs* (series 3) vol. 18, cc. 330–37.
- 83 3 June 1833, Hansard, *Parl. Debs* (series 3) vol. 18, cc. 308–17.
- 84 Because this orthodox Christian view is unpalatable to many scholars, they fail to countenance its sense of reality or motive power among Christians in the early nineteenth century. This applied across the spectrum of men and women involved in the debate over abolition.
- 85 Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, pp. 254, 268; Taylor, *The Interest*, p. 86.
- 86 Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography*, 4th ed., rev. (Colburn and Co, 1852), p. 530.
- 87 [Anonymous rev. of John Gladstone, *A Statement of Facts, connected with the Present State of Slavery in the British Sugar and Coffee Colonies*], 16 February 1831, *The Star* [np].
- 88 Taylor, *The Interest*, p. 189.
- 89 Taylor, *The Interest*, pp. 63–4.
- 90 Upon reading Alexander Barclay's admission that it could not be denied that 'concubinage was customary in the West Indies', William added prostitution to the common toll of sin – the pollution of London has no parallel in the West Indies! Barclay, *A Practical View of the present state of slavery in the West Indies*, GP Add. MS 44793, ff. 30–31.
- 91 [untitled memorandum], GP Add. MS 44821.d., f. 4. On 'original sin', William Gladstone to J.N. Gladstone, 10 November 1834, Huntington Library, Gladstone Papers, GLA 323.
- 92 William Gladstone to John Gladstone, 29 April 1833, GG 223/43, f. 82.
- 93 John Gladstone, *A Statement of Facts connected with the Present State of Slavery in the British Sugar and Coffee Colonies, and in the United States of America, together with a view of the present situation of the lower classes of the United Kingdom, contained in a letter addressed to the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart.* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1830).
- 94 William Gladstone to Helen Gladstone, 18 September 1832, cited in Checkland, *The Gladstones*, p. 259.
- 95 H. W. Wilberforce to Gladstone, 22 July 1833, GP Add. MS 44353, f. 200.

Continued on page 60

Introduction to Liberal history

In our series of short introductory articles, **James Moore** reviews one of the most well-known and widely quoted works of Liberal philosophy.

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*

JOHN STUART MILL'S 1859 essay *On Liberty* is probably the best-known statement of Liberal thought ever published.¹ It is often seen as the foundational text of a distinctively British form of Liberalism that spread around the world and strongly influenced Liberal parties in the Americas and across the British Commonwealth. The document is the symbol of office of the Liberal Democrat Presidency, a copy being presented to each new President on taking office.

One suspects, however, that few Liberal Democrats today pause to review its contents or reflect on how its messages might influence their own approach to Liberalism. In this short introduction we will provide an overview of Mill's core ideas and ask the difficult question: would Mill regard the Liberal Democrats as a Liberal party?

At one level, Mill's approach to liberty was quite simple. The liberty of the individual was paramount:

...that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering

with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant ...

In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.²

For Mill, individual liberty was essential for the development of the human personality and for the dignity of every civilised human being. Liberty was also the only consistent and permanent source of human improvement.³ Knowledge did not progress simply through the collection of new ideas about the world or new facts, but through the clash of freely expressed thoughts and opinions in an environment that fostered free debate.

Mill is sometimes criticised for not offering a more

developed definition of harm, but it is clear from *On Liberty* and his later writings that he felt the harm must be real and significant; liberty should not be taken away just to prevent someone feeling hurt or offended. The greatest harm that could be done to an individual and civil society was the suppression of individual liberty and free expression.

Mill was not just concerned with the tyranny of the state over the individual, but also with the tyranny of dominant opinions, that could be just as corrosive to individual freedom as institutional constraints over action. Like John Locke and many subsequent reformers, Mill advocated political and religious toleration, but believed that toleration was always under threat from the tyranny of dominant schools of thought and opinion, especially when they went unchallenged. Free speech and free debate meant that dominant ideas could never become tyrannical – that they would be placed under constant test and could be rejected or modified when found wanting. No individual could therefore be justified in the suppression of the views of

another. We see this famous position stated in his second chapter:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.⁴

Thus Mill presents us with not only a model for individual human happiness, dignity and fulfilment, he also demonstrates how free speech and freedom of action drives human progress.

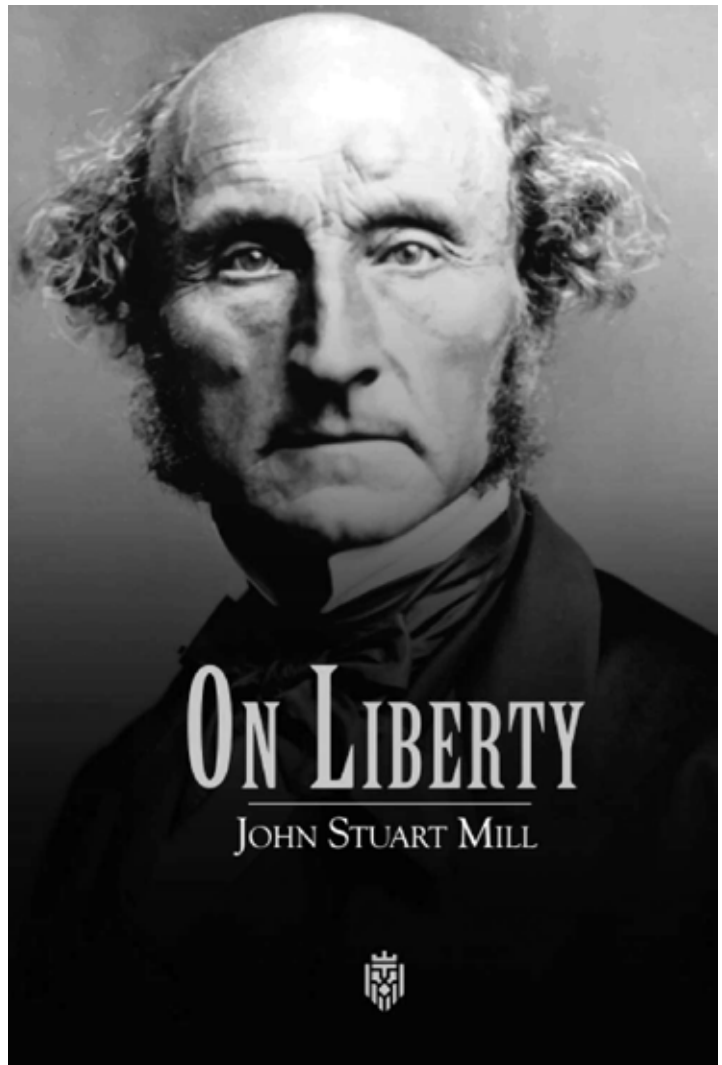
Of course, on first reading the modern reader may find some aspects of *On Liberty* and Mill's wider ideas about progress somewhat problematic. Mill was writing for an educated audience in 1859 and took it for granted that citizens needed certain qualities in order to participate fully in a political community. A certain degree of education and culture were assumed prerequisites, but it is important to understand that he felt that most individuals could attain these prerequisites in the right circumstances – including, controversially for the time, most women.

Similarly, although he supported the development of the British Empire, he did so in the belief that Britain's liberal approach to empire

would be the most effective way to spread modern education and liberal values to those who were yet to benefit from it. Liberal societies were not something that sprang up naturally, but were products of specific historical circumstances that favoured the development of a large middle class. Here we can see the echoes of Aristotle's ideas about the importance of a middle class for political stability and

progress. This did not, however, mean that Mill was hostile to working-class political claims – he instead implied that the labouring classes would ultimately be incorporated into the middle classes through the growth of education, culture and wealth.

Although Mill's essay was published in 1859, the year that the Liberal Party was formed, it was in no sense a statement of party



philosophy. The Liberal Party of 1859 was a complex coalition of Whigs, Radicals and followers of the former Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. The term 'Liberal' had originated in the 1820s, but had taken several decades to form into a distinctive political approach that favoured free trade and administrative reform, while opposing corruption and excessive taxation. At local level, Liberal Associations were often uneasy alliances between rival Whig and Radical factions. In two-member constituencies this rivalry often resulted in each faction putting up its own candidate, with sometimes bitter arguments arising when older members retired. It is not, then, surprising, that the new party issued no statement of political position – indeed, the modern party manifesto itself did not arrive until the late 1870s.

Stefan Collini has attempted to trace the changing reputation of Mill over time, from, in his words, 'sectarian radical to national possession'.⁵ It is certainly important to note that public reactions to Mill's 1859 essay were somewhat mixed. Although widely respected as a thinker, many of his ideas were regarded as being on the extreme political fringe. His radical views on women's political and social emancipation and his criticisms of marriage placed him open to charges of eccentricity. His

close relationship with a married woman, the radical feminist Harriet Taylor Mill, also raised eyebrows in elite circles; his later marriage to her after her first husband's death did little to silence wagging tongues.

He was a polite and interesting controversialist, but not the leader of a political movement. Unlike the modern liberal political philosopher John Rawls, he was not courted by presidents or prime ministers or, indeed, offered any significant role in the Liberal Party. When elected as an MP for the City of Westminster in 1865 he did so on a very radical platform that included votes for women. While he played a prominent role in the debates to extend the parliamentary franchise, famously putting down an unsuccessful amendment on 20 May 1867 to enfranchise women, his parliamentary career was short. He lost his seat at the 1868 general election; he was somewhat relieved to leave the political arena, as he found active politics uncongenial.

Mill's death on 5 May 1873 received mixed coverage in the national press. *The Times* newspaper famously noted that he was kind-hearted but 'often wrong-headed',⁶ while the 'advanced' Liberal press noted the passing of a respected figure, but implied that his ideas had, as yet, enjoyed only marginal impact on public debate.⁷ David Stack goes one step further and

suggests that the premature publication of Mill's *Autobiography* in the same year further undermined his wider reputation.⁸ Some read it as endorsing adultery and birth control, while others viewed it as a reason for censorship laws to protect public morality. Not only were Mill's ideas on free speech and expression still not widely accepted, his own writings were being cited as the very reason for restrictions. However, one also has to appreciate the wider context. While in 1867 Liberalism and reform were on the march, by the end of 1873 the Liberal government was, to use Disraeli's words, 'a range of exhausted volcanoes'. Outside Westminster the excesses of the Paris Commune and Irish nationalism meant that public opinion was more immediately concerned with public order and stability than individual freedom.

It took the final three decades of the nineteenth century for the reputation of Mill and *On Liberty* to be restored. Radicals such as E.J. Holyoake and 'Manchester School' Liberals such as Jacob Bright kept his wider ideas alive, while the Liberal individualism evident in *On Liberty* gradually became associated with mainstream Gladstonian Liberalism as Gladstone moved in a more radical direction and became 'the People's William'. Indeed, it was soon the case that many Liberal thinkers felt the need to justify

their positions with reference to Mill's work. Mill's views about widening the franchise, the emancipation of women and the importance of freedom of expression fitted much more with the spirit of the Edwardian age than the era in which his work was written. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the words of Marx and Engels were being more widely read by a new generation of working-class radicals, Mill offered a powerful intellectual antidote of Liberal individualism.

Yet Mill also presented something of a problem for supporters of what became known as the New Liberalism. At a time when Liberals were increasingly willing to use the state and higher taxation to tackle social problems, Mill's more individualistic views on personal responsibility and public action were something of a difficulty. Many thinkers tried to square the old Liberalism of Gladstone, Morley and Mill with the New Liberalism of Asquith and Lloyd George. L.T. Hobhouse's famous book *Liberalism* (1911) argued that there was justification within Mill's ideas for greater state intervention.⁹ After all, had Mill not noted the importance of removing constraints from individuals in order that they could become citizens and participate in the political community? Was poverty and ignorance not a constraint that needed removal? Didn't

Mill allow for state intervention to prevent harm to the liberty of others? Hobhouse thus offered a reinterpretation of Liberalism that emphasised not just the negative freedom from constraints but the positive freedom to act.

Whether these intellectual gymnastics were a fair reflection or extension of Mill's own views is open to question. Certainly, those who followed the school of Gladstone and Morley were not convinced and there remained in the Liberal Party a large number of Liberals who were sceptical of the New Liberalism. There were also many who believed that New Liberalism did not go far enough. The fragmentation of Liberalism in the twentieth century cannot be put down simply to the divisions between the rival camps of Lloyd George and Asquith; perhaps a more fundamental division was between rival intellectual interpretations of Liberalism – a debate in which *On Liberty* continued to be important.

By the 1950s Liberal manifestos owed much more to the economic and welfare interventionism of John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge than John Stuart Mill. Yet there were many who sought to emphasise the continuing importance of Mill's views in the new age of collectivism. Clement Davies' leadership speeches during the 1951 election echoed an individualism that could have

been taken directly from Mill, despite the party's commitment to Keynesianism and the welfare state. Neither did the resignation of Davies as party leader and the death of the 'last Gladstonian Liberal', Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, in 1956 mark the end of Mill's influence in the party or elsewhere. Britain's most famous post-war political philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, in his famous 'Two Concepts of Liberty', saw Mill's notion of 'negative liberty' as an important bulwark against the authoritarian political tendencies of modernity, and warned how 'positive liberty' had been distorted to empower nationalists and autocrats.¹⁰ F.A. Hayek, the architect of the post-war classical liberal revival, praised Mill in several parts of his renowned *Constitution of Liberty*.¹¹ Liberals Oliver Smedley and Arthur Seldon formed two-thirds of the triumvirate that created the Institute of Economic Affairs, arguably one of the most important classical liberal think-tanks of modern times, and one highly influential on Conservative thought in the 1970s.

Even for those who remained faithful to the Liberal Party, Mill remained significant. For Liberals campaigning for civil rights in the 1960s, Mill's thoughts on freedom of speech, expression and lifestyle had strong resonance, even if his views about the limited state were

less frequently recited or understood. The intellectual traditions represented by Mill certainly helped the Liberal Party articulate distinctive views on what were then unpopular subjects, particularly on questions of gay equality. Yet there were those within the Liberal Party who were worried that British Liberalism was losing its wider identity and morphing into what might be termed a form of welfare corporatism. Following his retirement as party leader, Jo Grimond authored a number of works that echoed Mill's views on Liberal individualism and criticised the collectivist tendencies of the Liberal Party in the 1970s.¹² The emergence of the SDP raised the issue of whether Liberalism and Social Democracy had essentially the same goals. When the SDP and Liberal Party formed a political alliance, some commentators joked that it worked because the SDP was led by a Liberal (Roy Jenkins) and the Liberals by a Social Democrat (David Steel). Critics worried that the 1983 manifesto was a defence of a corporatist consensus that had long since disappeared.

After the merger of the SDP and the Liberal Party, concerns over the identity of British Liberalism remained. Mill is still an important reference text for those who express concerns about some of the collectivist and paternalistic strands of Liberal Democrat thinking. It is doubtful, for example,

whether Mill would have had much truck with punitive taxes and restrictions on cigarettes, alcohol or fatty foods. For Mill, people should be able to make their own decisions and mistakes unless it could be demonstrated that those choices directly harmed others. Both Mill and Berlin warned that the bar of harm should be set very high, or all manner of restrictions on individual freedom could be justified by a dominant group or body of opinion. Their message was clear – fear the paternalists who are doing things to you for your own good.

Mill also provides uncomfortable reading for those who wish to police our thoughts and speech, or even to ban those who challenge orthodoxy (even a supposedly progressive orthodoxy). It is very doubtful that he would have supported the expulsion of party members (from any party) simply because they held unfashionable views or because they offended or upset another group of people within it. For Mill, the clash of ideas was essential for preventing the tyranny of ideas. Robust conflict was essential for political life and no group or individual should be safe from criticism. Mill believed in diversity of lifestyles, but he did not believe that citizens should be required to support, endorse or validate specific lifestyle choices of others. Nor did he believe all lifestyle choices necessarily equally

sensible; the value of lifestyle choices was something open to debate. For Mill the most important form of diversity was diversity of opinion. Compelling people to attend training courses in which they are compelled to think in a particular way or endorse particular lifestyle choices would appal him. Forcing someone from their job for failing to use approved language would also offend Mill's fundamental principles, even if that action is supported by majority or elite opinion. As we saw earlier, for Mill, one of the greatest tyrannies was the tyranny of majority or elite opinion. Views must be formed freely. Liberalism cannot be imposed, however strong the temptation to try might be.

For all the references that one finds to Mill in Liberal Democrat discourse, one wonders if the Liberal Democrats really are very liberal in the sense that Mill might have wished. Of course, all parties represent amalgams of intellectual traditions, but how far is Mill present in the core of Liberal Democrat philosophy? The preamble to the party constitution states that the Liberal Democrats seek to create a society in which no one would be enslaved by 'poverty, ignorance or conformity', a sentiment that would have met with Mill's approval. However, another part of the document offends against the main notion of *On Liberty*. It claims that the Liberal Democrats

seek to create a society in which they seek 'to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community'. Even leaving aside the questions of whether 'community' can be a value, it is doubtful whether Liberals in the tradition of Mill would favour balancing liberty again anything. This was a point well made by critics during the party merger debates in 1988, who argued Liberals stand for liberty above all else.¹³ Liberty is the route to self-fulfilment and self-realisation. It is essential for the dignity of every man and woman. Without it there can be no meaningful social progress and no genuinely free communities. Arguably, it is this inherent respect for the individual that set Liberalism apart from Socialist and Conservative world views. A critic might say that the failure to articulate this core philosophical point may be one reason why the Liberal Democrats have often struggled to offer a clear sense of their own identity – or, perhaps, to provide a compelling vision of a genuinely Liberal future.

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- 1 There is a very large body of scholarly literature on Mill's Liberalism and wider political philosophy. Good starting points and recent works include: J. Skorupski, *Why Read Mill today?* (2006), G. Scarre, *Mill's On Liberty: A Reader's Guide* (2007), N. Urbinati, *Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government* (2002), B. Kinzer, *J.S. Mill Revisited: Biographical and Political Explorations* (2007), R. Reeve, *J.S. Mill, Victorian Firebrand* (2007).
- 2 Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), p. 23.
- 3 Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 171.
- 4 Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 95
- 5 S. Collini, 'From sectarian radical to national possession: John Stuart Mill in English culture, 1873-1945,' in M. Laine (ed), *A cultivated mind: essays on J.S. Mill presented to John M. Robson* (Toronto 1991), 242-72.
- 6 *The Times*, 10 May 1873.
- 7 There were some significant variations in Liberal assessments. Perhaps the most fulsome praise came in the *Examiner*, 10 May 1873.
- 8 D. Stack, 'The Death of John Stuart Mill,' *The Historical Journal*, 54, 1 (2011), pp. 167-190. J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* (1873).
- 9 L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (1911).
- 10 I. Berlin, 'Two concepts of Liberty' (1958) republished in I Berlin, *Liberty* (2004).
- 11 F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960).
- 12 J. Grimond, *The Common Welfare* (1978), J. Grimond, *A Personal Manifesto* (1983).
- 13 The preamble to the Liberal party constitution was much more unequivocal in support of individual liberty. See <https://liberalconstitution.wordpress.com/2-2/> [Accessed 08/0923]

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Local elections

The Liberal Democrats' performance in the 2023 local elections looked impressive, but how strong was it really? **John Curtice** analyses what happened.

The Liberal Democrat Performance in the 2023 Local Elections: Breakthrough or Consolidation?

THIS MAY'S ENGLISH local elections were a key test for all the political parties.

Most of the country outside London was being balloted. This included the vast majority of those district councils that only hold elections every four years, among which are many of the so-called 'Blue Wall' constituencies where it is the Liberal Democrats rather than Labour who are the principal challengers to the Conservatives. These seats are expected to provide most of the party's best chances of increasing its parliamentary representation at the next general election. So being seen to do well in these local elections was therefore of particular importance for the Liberal Democrats.

And there was plenty for the party to cheer about in the results. It made a net gain of just over 400 seats, which represented a 33 per cent increase in its representation. The party gained overall control of 12 councils, which constituted no less than a 70 per cent increase in the number of councils in the party's hands. All these gains of control were in councils where elections are only held every four years and where, as a result, all the seats were up for grabs, thereby making a change of control more likely. All are located south of Birmingham and they include many a place that was once

represented by a Liberal Democrat MP, including Guildford, Newbury and Newton Abbott. In short, the headlines undoubtedly gave the impression of a party that had made further progress on the long road back to electoral viability following the severe rebuke it received from the electorate in the wake of its involvement in the coalition government of 2010–15.

However, Liberal Democrats do not need reminding that the outcome of a first-past-the-post election in terms of seats is not necessarily an accurate reflection of votes secured in the ballot box. This is particularly true of a round of local elections in which many wards were electing more than one councillor (thereby making the result potentially even more disproportional) and where the size of wards in terms of registered voters is typically much smaller in the more rural district councils than it is in the larger cities. In this article, therefore, we focus on how well the party performed in terms of votes rather than its haul in terms of seats.

Not this is entirely straightforward either. In 44 councils new ward boundaries were implemented this year, making ward by ward analysis of the ups and downs in party support since previous local elections difficult if not impossible. Not all wards are fought by all the main parties – Labour, for example, are often



absent from the ballot in many of the smaller more rural district councils in which the Liberal Democrats had a particular interest – and thus not all wards provide an indication of how well the parties are doing when faced with the kind of competition they will face in a general election. Meanwhile, although in most places it was possible to compare the results with the outcome of the local elections four years previously in May 2019, which is when 90 per cent of the seats at stake were last contested, those elections took place in unusual political circumstances. Mrs May was trying – and ultimately failing – to persuade MPs to approve the Brexit deal she had negotiated. Voters had defected from the Conservatives in droves, while Labour, also divided on Brexit, were at a relatively low standing in vote intention polls too. How well the parties performed as compared with then does not therefore give us a clear picture of the advances and setbacks in party support during this parliament.

The data we analyse here come from detailed ward by ward results collected by the BBC in just under 800 wards in 45 local authorities. The sample was designed to take account of these various constraints. The local authorities were all ones where elections take

place every year (other than the one year in four when county council elections are scheduled) and where, consequently, it was possible to compare the results with more years than just 2019. Indeed, in many instances, it was not only possible to compare the votes cast this year with the outcome in last year's local elections (before the downfall of both Boris Johnson and Liz Truss) and with those in 2021 (well before 'partygate' began to trouble Boris Johnson), but also with local elections stretching back as far as 2015 (when they took place on the same day as the general election). Meanwhile, the local authorities covered were ones where typically the wards are contested by all three main parties, and indeed our analysis here is confined to those wards that satisfied that condition both this year and in whatever previous year with which comparison is being made. All in all, just over 670 of the BBC's wards were contested by all three main parties in 2019 and 2023, while just over 640 satisfied that condition in 2022 and 2023. Between them these features of the sample mean it consists disproportionately of relatively large urban authorities, though it still contains a number of councils in which the Liberal Democrats have significant strength.

Key questions

Our analysis focuses in particular on two related issues. The Liberal Democrats' principal ambition at the next election appears to be to try and grow their parliamentary bridgehead by focusing their efforts on Conservative-held seats where the party came second in 2019. Indeed, this objective seems to matter more to the party than any attempt to increase its support more broadly. It is a strategy that, of course, anticipates that the Conservatives will continue to be deeply unpopular through to the next election and it is certainly one that has borne fruit in parliamentary by-elections since 2019. However, the outcome of one-off

The impression of the Liberal Democrat performance is one of consolidation rather than substantial progress.

parliamentary by-elections in which the Liberal Democrats can concentrate their limited campaign resources are not necessarily so easy to replicate in a nationwide contest. These local elections enable us to assess the potential prospects for such a strategy when the party is fighting on a broader canvass. Meanwhile, in line with this strategy and despite backing from the party conference for rejoining the EU, the party leadership at least has downplayed the issue of Brexit in the hope that this will ensure the issue does not prove an impediment to the party's ability to secure the support of disillusioned Conservatives who voted Leave in 2016. The local elections enable us to assess whether the party has been particularly successful or not in gaining ground in Leave-voting areas?

Overall performance

Table 1 shows the mean change in party support in the BBC's sample since each of 2019 (that is, the local elections in May, not the parliamentary election in December), 2021, and 2022. Despite having performed poorly four years ago, the Conservatives' vote was on average down by just over a point since 2019.

Meanwhile, the sharp reversal in the party's fortunes in the second half of the current parliament are underlined by its heavy loss of support since 2021, some of which only occurred in the last twelve months. In short, any party that was attempting to challenge the Conservatives in these elections, as both Labour and the Liberal Democrats were hoping to do, was likely to make notable gains of seats even if they themselves were not necessarily making much progress.

Indeed, we might note that questions could be raised about just how well either of the opposition parties performed. While Labour clearly performed more strongly than in 2019 and 2021, when it was in a relatively weak position in the polls, the party on average only recorded a

marginal advance on its performance in May 2022, even though since then the party's position in the national polls had strengthened considerably. This performance did little to assuage the doubts that Labour's poll lead was more a reflection of disenchantment with the Conservatives than enthusiasm for Labour itself. At the same time, the progress made by the Liberal Democrats looks rather less impressive than those figures of seats and councils gained we quoted earlier. Overall, the party was doing little more than treading water as compared with May 2019, while it also made only a marginal advance on last year. These figures give the impression of a party that was consolidating its position rather than one of a party that was making significant progress.

This impression is underlined by the estimates that, using the detailed voting data it collected, the BBC made of the 'projected national vote share'. This is an estimate of how well the parties would have done if local elections had taken place throughout Great Britain and if all three of the main Britain-wide parties had contested every ward. It is not an attempt at estimating what would have happened if a general election had taken place on local election day, but rather at providing a summary

Table 1 Change in party support since local elections of 2019, 2021 and 2022

	Mean change in % share of the vote			
	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	<i>Greens</i>
2019	-1.1	+6.0	+0.0	-0.2
2021	-10.3	+4.9	+3.9	+1.3
2022	-3.6	+0.4	+0.9	+1.3

Analysis based on wards contested by Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrats in both years. Figures for Greens based on the subset of those wards that they contested both times. Source: BBC sample of local election results.

measure of the parties' performances that is comparable across local elections even though the places in which such elections are held vary from year to year.

Indeed, that voters do not necessarily vote in local elections in the same way they would in a general election is clear from Table 2, which shows the projected national share for each set of English local elections since the 2010 general election. In particular, voters are more inclined to vote for the Liberal Democrats in local elections than they are in a general election – even in 2015 when the local elections took place on the same day as a general election, the party's projected national share was three points above what it obtained in the parliamentary ballot. We thus should use the measure to assess how well the parties did in 2023 in comparison with other local elections, and not with past parliamentary contests.

Again, the impression of the Liberal Democrat performance is one of consolidation rather than substantial progress. True, at 20 per cent, the party's projected national share was the highest it has been at any round of local elections since the party went into coalition with the Conservatives after the 2010 general election. But this represented no more than incremental progress on what the party had already achieved in both 2019 and 2021. Moreover, that 20 per cent figure is still well below what the party routinely scored in all local elections held between the 1992 and 2010 general elections; during that period the party's tally was never less than 24 per cent and was sometimes up to five points above that. While the 2023 elections confirmed that the

Liberal Democrats have partly repaired the severe damage done to their local election base by their involvement in the Conservative-led coalition, the party is still suffering some of the fallout from those years.

Why did the Conservatives lose so many seats?

How then were the Liberal Democrats able to gain over 400 seats? Indeed, why also did the Conservatives suffer a net loss of over a thousand seats, given their vote was only

Table 2 Projected national vote share for Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, English local elections, 2011–23

	<i>Con</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>LD</i>
	%	%	%
2011	35	36	16
2012	31	38	16
2013	25	29	14
2014	29	31	13
2015	35	29	11
2016	30	31	15
2017	37	28	18
2018	35	35	16
2019	28	28	19
2021	36	29	17
2022	30	35	19
2023	26	35	20

The elections that were due to be held in 2020 were postponed until 2021 on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: BBC.

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Table 3 Mean change in party support since 2019 and 2022 broken down by defending party				
	Mean change in % share of the vote since 2019			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Greens
Ward won in 2019 by:				
Conservatives	-6.0	+8.0	-0.2	+0.4
Labour	+0.4	+6.0	-0.2	+0.1
Liberal Democrats	+0.2	+3.7	+0.5	-0.8
	Mean change in % share of the vote since 2022			
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Greens
Ward won in 2019 by:				
Conservatives	-4.5	+1.7	+0.2	+1.3
Labour	-3.3	+0.2	+0.9	+1.6
Liberal Democrats	-2.9	-0.4	+1.8	+0.7
Analysis based on wards contested by Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrats in both years. Figures for Greens based on the subset of those wards that they contested both times. Source: BBC sample of local election results.				

marginally down on 2019? Prior to the elections the Conservatives had pointed to an academic projection that the party might suffer losses on that scale. They did so in the apparent hope and expectation that, in the event, the outcome would not prove quite so bad and thus could be portrayed as evidence of the party having turned a corner.

The answer lies in two key features of the variation in party performance. First, as compared with 2019 the Conservatives lost ground heavily in wards they were trying to defend, while they largely maintained their existing share of the vote elsewhere. As the first half of Table 3 shows, the party’s share of the vote fell on average by six points in wards the party won in 2019; elsewhere it actually edged up slightly. This pattern of heavy Conservative losses in the party’s heartlands was in fact also evident in last year’s local elections – but as the bottom half of Table 3 shows, it had been exacerbated over the last twelve months. In any event, although the Liberal Democrats were only treading water, the Conservative decline in seats they were defending meant that was still sufficient for the party to make gains at the Conservatives’ expense.

Second, there was notable anti-Conservative tactical voting, though some of the evidence is not immediately apparent. In the top half of Table 4 we look further at the change in support for each of the parties since 2019 in wards being defended by the Conservatives. The table shows separately what happened in wards where Labour had been second four years ago, and thus might be regarded as best placed locally to challenge the Conservatives, and those where the Liberal Democrats had been second in 2019. The decline in Conservative support was much the same irrespective of who was previously second. However, at 9.3 points, Labour’s progress in seats where it began in second place was three and a half points greater than in wards where the party had been behind the Liberal Democrats. That of course is precisely what we would anticipate if voters were more inclined to back Labour where they seemed to have the best chance of defeating the Conservatives locally. However, there is no sign here of the Liberal Democrats performing better in wards where they were previously second. Rather the party seems to have performed somewhat worse in those circumstances, not least it seems because of some strong performances by the Greens.

However, the second half of Table 4 paints a rather different picture. Here we analyse the change in party support since 2022 in wards that were won by the Conservatives on that occasion, again distinguishing between those wards where Labour had been second (again in 2022) and those where the Liberal Democrats were in that position. Once more the fall in Conservative support was much the same in both cases. Meanwhile, we can now see that not only did Labour advance on its support last year in wards where it had been second last year, while failing to do so elsewhere, but also that the Liberal Democrats advanced on average by more than five points where they had been second while at the same time falling back slightly elsewhere. In those local authorities where local elections had taken place more recently than 2019 at least, voters' decisions about casting an anti-Conservative tactical vote seem to have taken account of the evidence of more recent local elections.

Indeed, we can see this directly if we divide those wards where the Liberal Democrats had been second to the Conservatives in 2019 into two groups – those where the party was also second (or first) in 2022 and those where more

recently Labour had been the better placed of the main opposition parties. In the former group, support for the Liberal Democrats was up on average on 2019 by 5.9 points, whereas in the latter support for the party was down on average by as much as 12 points. In contrast, Labour's share of the vote increased by as much as 15.4 points in wards where it had become the main challenger to the Conservatives, but by only 1.1 points where the party still trailed the Liberal Democrats.

Against this backdrop it comes as little surprise that the scale of the Conservatives' losses proved to be so heavily. A party that loses ground most heavily in seats it is defending is bound to suffer much heavier losses than would otherwise be the case – indeed this is arithmetically almost bound to be what happens when a party's overall performance is as weak as that of the Conservatives. Meanwhile, a significant body of voters appear to have been motivated to vote for whichever candidate was best placed locally to defeat the Conservatives. It is a pattern that is redolent of the Conservatives' performance in local elections in the run up to the 1997 general election – and subsequently at that election

Table 4 Mean change in party support since 2019 and 2022, in wards held by Conservatives, by second-placed party

<i>Wards held by Conservatives in 2019</i>				
	<i>Mean change in % share of the vote since 2019</i>			
	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	<i>Greens</i>
<i>Second-placed party in 2019:</i>				
Labour	–6.1	+9.3	–0.7	–1.0
Liberal Democrats	–6.3	+5.8	–2.3	+4.2
<i>Wards held by Conservatives in 2022</i>				
	<i>Mean change in % share of the vote since 2022</i>			
	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	<i>Greens</i>
<i>Second-placed party in 2022:</i>				
Labour	–6.2	+3.6	–0.6	+0.6
Liberal Democrats	–6.3	–0.9	+5.4	–0.1
Analysis based on wards contested by Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrats in both years. Figures for Greens based on the subset of those wards that they contested both times. Source: BBC sample of local election results.				

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Table 5 Change in party support since 2015, 2019 and 2021 by EU referendum vote 2016			
	Mean change in % share of the vote		
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
Since 2019			
2016 Leave <53%	-0.0	+4.3	+0.2
2016 Leave 53%+	-2.6	+7.4	-0.1
Since 2021			
2016 Leave <53%	-7.9	+2.8	+4.1
2016 Leave 53%+	-11.9	+6.3	+3.7
Since 2015			
2016 Leave <53%	-13.3	+7.4	+10.2
2016 Leave 53%+	-4.4	+7.0	+6.5
Analysis based on wards contested by Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrats in both years. % Leave is an estimate of the outcome of the 2016 referendum in a ward compiled by Jon Mellon on the basis of data originally created by Chris Hanretty. Source: BBC sample of local election results.			

too, when the party won just 165 seats and found itself in a far worse position than Labour after its defeat under Jeremy Corbyn in 2019.

All this would appear to augur well for the Liberal Democrats’ hopes of profiting from Conservative misfortune at the next election. At the same time, however, there is an implied warning to the party that its ability to secure anti-Conservative tactical votes from those who might otherwise back Labour may be limited to fewer constituencies than it might hope. If at the next election the polls are painting much the same impression as they are at present, with Labour therefore in a much stronger position than in 2019 – and the Liberal Democrats not – then in Conservative/Liberal Democrat battleground seats where Labour were not far behind in third place in 2019 voters might conclude that perhaps Labour, not the Liberal Democrats, now appear the better anti-Conservative bet.

Party performance and Brexit

But what of the other strand of the party’s current electoral strategy, its decision not to place much emphasis on the issue of Brexit. Is

there any evidence that this is making it easier for the party to gain votes in places that voted more heavily for Leave in 2016? Table 5 compares the mean change in party support in wards where less than 53 per cent are estimated to have voted Leave with that in wards where 53 per cent or more voted that way. The comparison is undertaken for three previous baselines, 2019, 2021 and 2015.

The Conservatives have evidently had particular difficulty in retaining the particularly strong support they secured in Leave voting areas under Boris Johnson. This is particularly the case as compared with 2021 – when Boris Johnson was still Prime Minister and much of the electoral coalition that voted for the party in the 2019 general election was still backing the Conservatives in the polls. At 11.9 points the average fall in Conservative support since 2021 is four points higher in wards that voted relatively strongly for Leave than in those that backed Brexit less enthusiastically if at all. Yet while Labour, who have also opted to be relatively quiet about Brexit, have advanced more strongly in wards with more pro-Leave voters, there is no sign of the Liberal Democrats having done so. Whether the comparison is made with May 2019 or with May 2021, the party’s

performance looks much the same in the two kinds of ward. Moreover, this picture is not changed if we confine our attention to Conservative-held wards. Indeed, as compared with 2021, the increase in Liberal Democrat support in Conservative-held wards that voted more strongly for Leave (+1.5 points) is somewhat less than the progress the party achieved in wards where support for Leave was lower (+4.0), a difference that is not accounted for by whether the party was previously second locally or not.

Indeed, the table also shows that, if we compare what happened in 2023 with the pattern of party support at the 2015 local elections, the Liberal Democrats' long-term progress since its electoral position reached its nadir has been somewhat greater in wards that were less keen on Brexit (+10.2 points) than it has been in those where support for Leave was lower (+6.5). In short, there is little sign that the party has had much success in reversing the impact

with an apparent willingness by some voters to vote tactically against the Conservatives between them suggest that the party's hopes of making gains in Conservative-held seats where it is the principal challenger locally are not unrealistic. That said, there was little evidence of the party itself registering any significant increase in overall support, and coupled with the increased popularity that Labour is currently enjoying in the polls, this could reduce at the next general election the number of seats where voters decide that the Liberal Democrats are the main challenger to the Conservatives. There are potentially limits to the success of a geographically focused campaign that is not accompanied by a broader increase in the popularity of the party.

Meanwhile, although Labour do appear to have had some success in recovering the ground it lost in areas that voted more heavily for Leave in 2016, there is little sign in these results that the tactic of saying little about

Brexit is enabling the Liberal Democrats to achieve a similar relative success in more Leave-inclined areas. Rather, the geography of the party's sup-

There are potentially limits to the success of a geographically focused campaign that is not accompanied by a broader increase in the popularity of the party.

port is much the same now as it was four years ago when, for the time being at least, it was the only party seeking to revisit the Brexit decision. That said, the party is still able to profit from Conservative misfortune wherever it has local strength, irrespective of whether an area is pro- or anti-Brexit. And maybe for the time being at least, that might be thought good enough?

of the Brexit debate on the electoral geography of its support in local government elections. Again, this stands in sharp contrast to Labour, whose relative success in wards that were more strongly inclined towards Leave means that it has largely reversed the relative loss of support it suffered in such places during the Brexit debate. This is evidenced by the fact that as compared with 2015, Labour's vote was on average up almost as much in more pro-Leave wards (+7.0 points) as it was in those that voted less strongly for Brexit (+7.4).

Conclusion

There was plenty of good news for the Liberal Democrats in the results of the 2023 local elections. The Conservatives' electoral difficulties, especially in areas of past strength, coupled

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Report

Shirley Williams: Liberal Lion and Trailblazer

Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting, 17 March 2023, with Mark Peel, Lord Tom McNally and Baroness Julie Smith. Chair: Baroness Judith Jolly
Report by **Neil Stockley**

AS A LIBERAL Democrat icon, Shirley Williams stood alongside Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy. David Steel once described her as ‘a national treasure, rather like the late Queen Mum’. This meeting discussed Shirley’s appeal to liberals and sought to understand her political legacy.

Mark Peel, Shirley’s biographer, described her as ‘a doughty campaigner, a brilliant communicator, a champion of progressive causes and a woman of charm and integrity’. Had the fates been kinder to her and the Labour Party not self-destructed when she was coming into her prime, he suggested, Shirley could have held high office for a long time.

But he argued that Shirley’s legacy ‘lies more in the quality of her personality than in her legislative or administrative achievements’.

Education

Mark Peel began by examining Shirley’s record on education. First, he described her

achievements as higher education minister during the late 1960s. At a time of university expansion and student unrest, she gave students representation on academic courts and university boards and student unions more autonomy.

Shirley was prescient in recognising that with a slowing economy, the country’s generous provision for universities would no longer be sustainable. Shirley proposed her ‘thirteen points’ aimed at enabling universities to cut their costs without compromising quality. The higher education sector rejected the plan. Her response – that they would have to adapt or eventually find themselves short of funds – was vindicated during the 1980s.

Mark Peel painted a more mixed picture of Shirley’s time as education secretary after 1976. She faced a growing crisis in state education as right-wing academics and papers lambasted the government over the performance of comprehensive schools and called for a return to ‘more traditional values’. The prime minister, Jim Callaghan,

responded by launching his great educational debate. He left it to Shirley put in place a new national curriculum, a new 16-plus exam, and better vocational opportunities for all.

Shirley’s ‘procrastination while she consulted all and sundry’ frustrated Callaghan and when her Green Paper finally appeared, six months later than expected, Number 10 found its proposals ‘sparse and complacent in tone’.

Whilst improvements were made, nothing of substance had been implemented by the time Labour left office in 1979.

Mark Peel believed that Shirley’s most important legacy from her time in government ‘for better or for worse’, was her campaign against the grammar schools. By the time she had finished, some 400 grammar schools remained.

To her supporters, Shirley helped create a fairer education system provided greater opportunities for the majority. Her opponents believed that the abolition of grammar schools eroded academic standards especially at top of the ability range. He also noted Robert Skidelsky’s observation that an unintended consequence of the demise of direct grant and grammar schools was a boost to the struggling independent education sector.

The meeting did not pursue these issues, but Shirley’s Labour, SDP and Liberal Democrat colleague Tom McNally provided some

important context He pointed out that Margaret Thatcher, as education secretary under Edward Heath, closed more grammar schools than Shirley. The political debate over education from the 1970s to the 1990s was highly ideological and the legacy of a strengthened independent schools sector, Tom McNally suggested, was the 'sclerosis of mobility' that we see today.

Europe and foreign policy

Mark Peel went on to highlight the fortitude and foresight that Shirley displayed as a Labour MP over Britain's role in Europe. Like many Labour intellectuals who entered the Commons in the 1960s, she had long been a passionate European. She recognised that wages, pensions and paid holidays were higher in the Common Market countries. Shirley also understood that the UK on its own would have little influence in a world dominated by great powers.

After Labour returned to opposition in 1970, however, anti-European sentiment grew steadily within the party, and its internal divisions worsened. Labour seized on the European issue as a stick with which to beat Edward Heath's unpopular Conservative government and in October 1971 opposed the terms of entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) that Heath had negotiated. Mark Peel argued that

Shirley showed considerable courage by becoming one of the 69 Labour MPs who defied the whip to vote with the government. After being reprimanded by her constituency Labour party, Shirley privately despaired to the point where she considered retiring from politics.

But she stayed and joined Wilson's new Cabinet in 1974. In the run-up to the 'in or out' referendum the following year, she was prominent in the 'Yes' campaign, arguing that the EEC was a vital market for British exports and membership essential for raising peoples' standard of living. There was no doubt, Mark Peel said, that she was by this time fully committed to the European ideal.

Tom McNally also paid tribute to Shirley's courage and recalled that she was 'a fighter to the very end over Europe'. (Interestingly, his remark that if Shirley were alive today, he was sure 'she would be urging the Liberal Democrats to be brave about Europe' brought a warm burst of applause from the audience.)

Julie Smith added that Shirley's experiences of being evacuated to the United States during World War II, and lecturing at Harvard during the 1980s and 1990s were important in shaping her foreign policy analysis and her internationalist principles. Shirley rejected the notion that the UK had to choose between the United States and Europe;

she understood that it was possible to be both an Atlanticist and a European.

Julie Smith reminded us that Shirley's internationalism had other, important dimensions. In the early 1980s, she visited Poland and campaigned with the Solidarity trade union. Later, she worked passionately and consistently in support of the new democracies and advocated of democracy, European integration and enlargement for the countries of central and eastern Europe.

Julie Smith added that Shirley was a sophisticated analyst of international affairs. In 2010, for instance, she advocated gradual reductions in the UK's nuclear weapons capability which, she argued, could encourage other countries to do the same as part of a global move toward nuclear disarmament. Julie acknowledged that Shirley was speaking in much less perilous times than we live in today, but said her proposal demonstrated how she 'sought to change the world stage by stage rather than overnight and in a way that would not be effective'.

Leadership

The discussion of Shirley's personal strengths and weaknesses provided the most interesting insights into her legacy. Mark Peel described her as an immensely talented politician with cross-party appeal; she was as having the potential to be the first

woman prime minister. But when opportunities came her way, she seized them only half-heartedly, as happened in the 1976 contest with Michael Foot for the Labour deputy leadership, or refused to stand at all, as with the first SDP leadership election in 1982.

Mark Peel suggested that Shirley may have been sufficiently self-aware to realise that 'she wasn't cut out for leadership'. He suggested three reasons. The first was Shirley's 'rather disorganised lifestyle' as illustrated by her lack of punctuality and untidy appearance. Second, she disliked having responsibility in that it restricted her freedom and independence and she loathed media intrusion into her personal life. Third, and perhaps most important, she lacked the confidence to take on the 'less forgiving' side of political leadership – managing rivals, disciplining colleagues and taking unpopular decisions. At no stage did she court the press, build up a close-knit body of supporters or lead a sophisticated private office.

Mark Peel quoted the former Labour MP David Marquand who once said that 'Shirley was a very bad politician because she didn't realise how strong she was'. She could deploy her political passion to great effect, Mark Peel said, as she showed in her tirade against the hard left at the 1980 Labour Party conference. Even so, 'her undoing lay in her failure to gamble', he concluded.

As her friend David Alton once observed, 'she lacked the killer instinct' needed to win and hold a leadership role.

Tom McNally suggested that being the daughter of Vera Brittain 'cast a long shadow over her . . . she always felt she was working in her mother's shadow'.

His main contention was that while Shirley may have had faults that prevented her from reaching the top, she simply had 'bad luck' in that 'time and chance did not arrive for her'. Political careers, Tom explained, were affected by so many external factors, including luck, as well as hard work, intellect and strength that it was hard to make definitive judgements. 'The real loser was us,' he said ruefully, 'because we lost a great woman prime minister'.

Tom advanced the familiar argument that if Shirley had fought the 1981 Warrington by election, she would have won and then gone on to become the SDP's first leader, instead of Roy Jenkins. He believed that with Shirley and David Steel as joint leaders, the SDP–Liberal Alliance would have made the electoral breakthrough that eluded the party in 1983 and 1987. Jenkins, he explained, was 'too big a figure' to make a new party's appeal to a new generation but Shirley and David Steel 'encapsulated what people wanted from a new party'. Shirley's refusal to contest Warrington has always seemed

to me a notable example of her failure to seize big opportunities when they came along rather than of bad luck. In any case, as David Steel himself pointed out via Zoom, whoever led the Alliance would have had to contend with the 'Falklands factor' that was so important in Mrs Thatcher's 1983 election victory.

All three speakers described the many personal qualities that made Shirley such a positive force in British politics. Even if she did not live up to her early potential, Mark Peel said, she was a brilliant campaigner, orator, media performer and teacher of politics at Harvard. He described her as an exemplary public servant of great integrity. One of her most important achievements, he said, had been to give women a voice in politics.

Tom McNally paid tribute to her 'amazing intellect' and her consistent ability to intervene in House of Lords debates with 'a stream of eloquent, articulate, grammatical speech [which was] almost always radical, brave and incisive'. She was a source of inspiration to millions. He recalled walking with her on one of the last anti-Brexit marches down Whitehall and being continually stopped by people coming up to speak with her, saying things like 'Shirley, you changed my life' or 'Shirley, you were the person that brought me into politics'.

Even if Shirley was never a party leader, Julie Smith agreed, she led by example, inspiring and empowering other women politicians. Tom Nally recalled that when Shirley first became an MP, in 1964, there were very few women in the Commons and Labour's talented 'alpha males' were very difficult to survive with. The younger women politicians of more recent times had not appreciated fully how difficult it had been for her but 'they stand on the shoulders of people like Shirley who had to operate politics in a far, far more hostile world for women', he argued.

During the question-and-answer session, Tom observed that she demonstrated great integrity in deciding to leave the Labour Party, primarily because it had become very anti-Europe and she could not survive Harold Wilson-style contortions. 'That's politics but you also need politicians prepared to take a hit for integrity', he remarked. Mark Peel recalled that Shirley was paid well for appearing on *Any Questions* but often asked for the money to go to charity, without making a public point of her virtue. The day after she lost her Crosby seat in 1983, Shirley fulfilled an engagement at a local school, even though she was surrounded by tv cameras. Although the hard left denigrated and abused her as she fell out with the Labour Party, Shirley hardly

ever bad-mouthed other politicians.

Shirley's political style was summed up best by Julie Smith who grew up in Crosby and, at the age of twelve, worked on her successful by-election campaign in November 1981. Julie remembered her as an 'inspirational' campaigner and recalled her charisma and charm. 'Shirley would look you in the eye; whoever you were, wherever you came from, she would treat you as an equal', Julie said. She was willing to talk to anyone and could mingle with all sorts of people. Everyone called Shirley by her first name, she recalled.

Julie Smith recounted that a function after the

by-election, she posed a question to Shirley who responded, 'That's a very intelligent question'. 'Maybe that's because of the school I go to', replied Julie, who attended a private school. 'She didn't try to put me down', Julie remembered, and wondered 'how many politicians would just say, "I will accept what a young girl is saying"? So many would want to have the last word.'

'Shirley didn't – she inspired by her passion and integrity, not by putting people down', Julie concluded, 'and that's a pretty important legacy'.

Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

Reviews

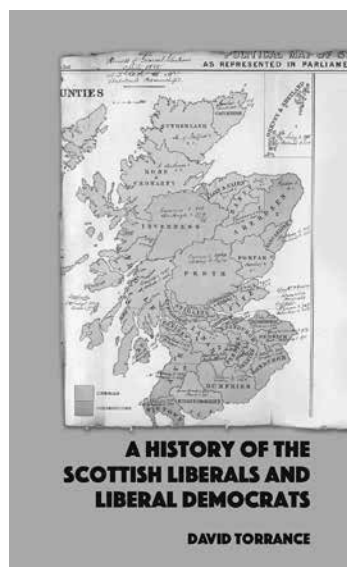
Liberals in Scotland

David Torrance, *A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022)

Review by **Jim Wallace**

SCOTTISH POLITICAL HISTORY is being well served by David Torrance. Not only has he written biographies on George Younger, David Steel, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, he has also published books on the Secretaries of

State for Scotland, the relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Scotland ('*We in Scotland*': *Thatcherism in a Cold Climate*) and the relationship between nationalism and unionism in Scotland (*Standing Up for Scotland*). He has now indicated his intention



to write single-volume histories of each of Scotland's four main political parties, starting with the Scottish Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats.

Torrance notes that there is a paucity of literature on the history of Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats, and, with remarkable diligent research, he has remedied the position with the publication of *A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats*. As he, himself, observes, this omission to date is remarkable given that 'Party and nation became synonymous, with Scottish Liberal policy and thought influencing national identity and permeating public discourse' for ninety years after the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832.

It is also the case that Scottish Liberalism and Scottish Liberal Democracy have played a disproportionate role in the wider UK party. Four

of the last five Liberal prime ministers were either Scots or sat for a Scottish constituency. Between 1880 and 2019, nine of the UK party leaders sat for Scottish seats in addition to Lord Rosebery who sat in the House of Lords. Moreover, the inspiration and involvement of key Scottish Liberals in Gladstone's Midlothian campaigns had consequences for country and party well beyond Scotland.

Given that the history and timeline of the party north of the border parallels much of what was happening elsewhere in the (and so will be very familiar to Liberal historians furth of Scotland), it is very welcome that we now have a distinctively Scottish perspective on events and the ebbs and flows of Liberal fortunes. The book also sheds light on the sometimes tortuous organisational relationships between the Scottish party and the party organisation in London.

What struck me was how historic concerns still resonate today, and how certain themes recur. Admittedly some of the major issues of the nineteenth century such as temperance and disestablishment are no longer on the political agenda, but others such as education, land reform and especially home rule are still pertinent. In 1917, the secretary of state, Robert Munro, introduced education reforms which established Catholic education within the public

sector, an issue which still can prompt controversy today. He also proposed raising the school leaving age to fifteen and promoted directly elected education authorities. (Torrance omits to mention that they were elected using the single transferable vote.) The author quotes Munro's speech at second reading, where he says that the objective of the Bill is 'the better education of the whole people of Scotland, irrespective of social class, age, sex, or place of residence'. Any self-respecting Liberal Democrat today would heartily endorse that. In 1917, it was thought to be a bold and radical step forward.

Torrance also describes some of the tentative steps taken to promote land reform, not least the Smallholders Bill, brought forward in the teeth of opposition from both Tory and Liberal grandees in the House of Lords, but credited by some as being the reason why the Scottish Liberal vote held up in both elections of 1910. But, as Torrance observes, 'it proved a damp squib in practice'. It was not until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, ninety years later, that any serious land reform legislation was taken forward, principally by two Scottish Liberal Democrat ministers.

However, the author does describe one aspect of land reform which was implemented to some effect. Following the election of five

crofting candidates in the Highlands and Islands in 1885, Gladstone's government acted promptly and several Crofting Acts ensued. Not only did they ensure the return of four of the members to the Liberal fold in the ensuing general election, ninety-seven years later, when I fought Orkney and Shetland for the first time, I was invited to join the crew of one of the inter-island ferries for a cup of tea in the crew's cabin, where I found one of my election leaflets pinned to the wall with the words, 'Mr Gladstone's Man' inscribed underneath!

The urgency with which crofting reform legislation was brought forward clearly reflected electoral anxiety. But it was also a rare example of a specifically Scottish issue being afforded legislative time. In the decades leading to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the complaint was regularly heard that Westminster had little or no time to address Scottish issues. What surprised me reading Torrance's book is that notwithstanding Liberal electoral dominance in Scotland, this concern was nothing new. In 1869, Scottish Liberal MPs wrote to Gladstone 'protesting the management of Scottish affairs'. The author quotes a strongly worded letter from Rosebery to Gladstone in 1882 complaining that 'not one minute of Government time has been allotted to Scotland or Scottish affairs'. He also quotes

a handbook for Scottish Liberals published in 1900, complaining that Scottish affairs suffered from lack of Parliamentary time and being 'overruled by the votes of English members'. It has a very familiar ring.

Unsurprisingly, such discontent fuelled a theme which runs throughout this book, namely Scotland's relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. For a number of decades, it could not be wholly disentangled from the Irish Home Rule question. But Torrance shines light on how the issue was the cause of splits and disputation and the spawning ground for alignments and realignments among Scottish Liberals, Liberal Unionists, Scottish Unionists as well as internal party tensions among Radicals, the Scottish Liberal Association, the 'Liberal League' and the Young Scots Society. The machinations, motions, countermotions involving key personalities and peppered by splits over the Boer War make fascinating reading, albeit somewhat depressing.

And it didn't stop with the decline of the party after the First World War. Torrance documents how the rise of nationalism and the SNP led to many discussions and heart searching over what the relationship should be between the two parties which continued through the 1940s and into the 1960s, until it was clear that neither party was likely to cede ground for electoral pacts.

Many of those discussions took place after the 'Strange Death of Liberal Scotland'. The author documents the fall of a party which as late as 1910 could still command over 50% of the vote and fifty-eight out of seventy Scottish MPs to the party executive meeting of the 1940s when discussion was essentially about how to keep the life-support machine on. Torrance is to be hugely commended for his patience in wading through the minutes of these executive meetings. And he is to be commended for highlighting the role played by the unsung Lady Glen-Coats in keeping some kind of show on the road, thus facilitating a party renaissance under Jo Grimond, Johnny Bannerman and Russell Johnston, and ensuring that fifty years later, Scottish Liberal Democrats had the opportunity to shape the longed-for Scottish Parliament and participate in government.

If I have a criticism of the book (and I confess that I am not an objective bystander), it is that it doesn't cover adequately the role of Scottish Liberal Democrats in government, both at Holyrood and Westminster. It seems odd that when so much attention is (rightly) given to the Home Rule/devolution issue, no mention is made of the 2010 coalition agreement which stated, 'The parties agree to the implementation of the Calman commission proposal' and that the subsequent legislation,

Scotland Act 2012, which materially augmented the initial devolution settlement was taken through both Houses of Parliament by Liberal Democrat ministers. Nor is there any reference to the International Development Act 2015, which created a statutory duty for official development assistance to meet the United Nations target of 0.7% of gross national income – a longstanding Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment which Michael Moore MP took up as a private member's bill in the House of Commons and was sponsored in the Lords by Lord (Jeremy) Purvis.

But in no way should that detract from what is a highly

readable, informed and much to be commended account of Scottish Liberal and Liberal Democrat history. And Torrance is generous in concluding that Scotland of today being a more liberal country 'by temperament and belief owes something to the influence of Scottish Liberalism in all its manifestations between 1832 and 2021'.

Jim Wallace, Baron Wallace of Tankerness, was MP for Orkney & Shetland 1983–2001 and MSP for Orkney 1999–2007. He was Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats 1992–2005 and of the Liberal Democrat peers 2013–16, and Deputy First Minister of Scotland 1999–2005.

While his title is a play on Dangerfield's, Bogdanor's core argument that Britain's political, constitutional and parliamentary institutions were in relatively good health on the eve of the First World War is more directly in contradiction to Simon Heffer's recent *The Age of Decadence*, which portrays this era as one in which the ruling classes became complacent and lost their will to govern, leading to national decline. Bogdanor by contrast highlights the resilience and adaptability of Britain's political institutions in the face of serious challenges that might have threatened their stability.

While these arguments are in this reviewer's opinion well-made and persuasive, I would recommend the book to *Journal of Liberal History* readers not because I agree with its conclusions, but because it is an outstanding guide to the political history of Britain in the two decades before the First World War. At over 800 pages it is long enough to give detailed treatment to key events and issues and has the merit of taking the time and space to explain the underlying background to political controversies that were important in their time, but which can leave modern readers wondering what the fuss was about. It left me wishing this book had existed when I was studying the period as an undergraduate and postgraduate, often

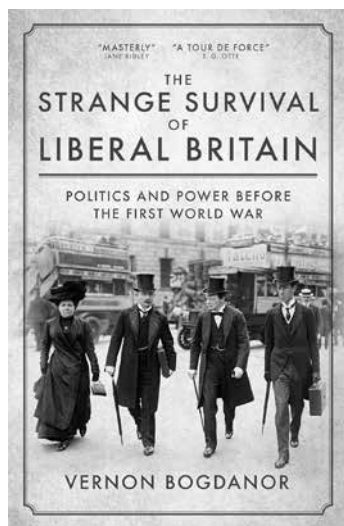
Strange Survival

Vernon Bogdanor, *The Strange Survival of Liberal Britain: Politics and power before the First World War* (Biteback Publishing 2022)

Review by **Iain Sharpe**

WHILE THE VALUE OF George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* as a work of history has been disputed almost since its publication in 1935, it continues to cast a long shadow over historical writing. It remains the starting point for the debate about the decline of Liberalism and the rise of the Labour party. It has provided inspiration for many subsequent

titles. In the hands of different authors Tory England, Labour Scotland and Liberal America, among others, have undergone *Strange deaths*. Others have proclaimed *Strange rebirths* of Liberal England and Liberal Britain, in addition to the *Strange survival of liberal England*. As if to complete the set we now have *The strange survival of liberal Britain* from the eminent political scientist Professor Vernon Bogdanor.



finding that the background to questions like Irish land or the religious dimension of educational reform were never properly explained as specialised monographs assumed prior knowledge and textbooks merely narrated key events. Bogdanor does an excellent job explaining why such things mattered so much at the time.

The author states at the outset that there is an element of debunking in his narrative, although he suggests that this is the result of his research rather than part of his original intention. So, for example, he challenges the view commonly held (particularly by those with left-liberal leanings) that the delay in allowing women to vote was primarily down to misogyny. While acknowledging that misogyny was part of it, he sets out why this was a thorny issue. Both the main pressure groups that campaigned for votes

for women wanted it on the basis of the existing franchise, which would have meant votes only for the small proportion of women who were householders, primarily spinsters and widows. It would have excluded almost all married women.

For the Liberal Party, enfranchising only these (mainly propertied) women would have benefited the Conservatives and thus been electorally damaging. So the issue needed to be considered in the context of other desirable reforms, including removal of plural voting and the university franchise, together with a move towards universal adult suffrage. While by no means exonerating those who delayed introducing votes for women, Bogdanor shows how devising a measure that would have granted this, addressed other demands for franchise reform and gained a majority in both houses of Parliament was more difficult than it appears in hindsight.

On other questions too Bogdanor takes aim at what he calls 'myths ... that have become common currency, but are almost entirely mistaken'. These include the view that the 1899–1902 South African War was instigated by Britain, that the Labour Party was in a position to overtake the Liberals before the First World War, that Britain was on the verge of civil war in 1914 and that the country 'sleepwalked' into a

world war that it could and should have kept out of. One might debate how far some of these really are common currency – do many people really argue that the concentration camps of the South African war differed only in degree from those of Nazi Germany? But his arguments are always thought-provoking and mostly convincing.

In particular his defence of Sir Edward Grey's European diplomacy is compelling and persuasive, as indeed is his concluding claim that by the end of this period Britain had succeeded in maintaining and even strengthening its liberal political culture as it faced the 'terrible challenge of war'. If there is a common theme it is to recognise the dilemmas faced by those who governed, to 'approach their proposed solutions with sympathy for their difficulties' and 'not to use the advantage of hindsight'. This makes for a more generous interpretation of the period than that of Heffer or indeed of many modern historians.

Some may see Bogdanor's work as old-fashioned, a top-down survey of British politics with little or no 'history from below' or reference to wider cultural matters, and with Scotland, Wales and different regions of England mentioned only in passing. Yet the author is open about his methods and intentions, and there surely remains a place for such works within the spectrum of historical writing. Aside from its

narrative and key arguments, it is worth pausing to note that the book includes a useful set of maps, timeline of key events and an excellent essay offering guidance on further reading. Anyone seeking to enhance their understanding and knowledge of British politics at the end of the nineteenth

and beginning of the twentieth centuries need look no further than this outstanding volume.

Dr Iain Sharpe studied history at Leicester and London Universities, completing a doctoral thesis on the Liberal Party in the Edwardian era. He was a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford for 30 years.

Wife of Lloyd George

Richard Rhys O'Brien, *The Campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George: The wife of the Prime Minister 1916–1922* (Y Lolfa, 2022)

Review by **Russell Deacon**

THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY of the fall of the Lloyd George coalition saw a book published that gave a first-hand account of its inner workings, from no less than the prime ministers' wife, Margaret Lloyd George. The period that is covered in this book (1918–22) was the last point at which the Liberal Party was the driving force in British politics, even if it was only the section of the party headed by David Lloyd George. It was also the last period in Wales in which the Liberals were superior in parliamentary numbers to any other party – and in which one of their own projected a Welsh voice into 10 Downing Street for the first and only time.

There have been dozens of books written about David Lloyd George both during and after his life. *The Campaigns of*

Margaret Lloyd George, written by Richard Rhys O'Brien from his own family archive and some additional sources, is the first book to cover the role of Lloyd George's first wife in detail. O'Brien's grandfather, the Rev. J. T. Rhys (JTR), was private secretary to Margaret, and it is through his papers that O'Brien brings to life much of the record of events and behind-the-scenes political thought of Margaret, David Lloyd George and the wider coalition Liberal Party during the period 1918–22.

The book is not just about the campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George; it also serves as a substantial biography of her. As such, it goes outside of the time frame on the book's cover on occasions.

Thus, we are told that, unlike her husband, daughter, son

and son-in-law, she was not elected as a member of parliament; but she was a constant political figure and also an elected one. She was a councillor and council leader on Cricieth Urban District Council and was also elected to many Liberal bodies and other associations for most of her adult life. She didn't confine herself to the council chambers, however; unlike LG, Margaret actively campaigned in by-elections for the coalition Liberals – some eighteen by-elections during this period. This was against the practice of the day, which was for prime ministers not to campaign in by-elections. This therefore meant that, during the October 1922 Newport by-election, which was central to Lloyd George's future as prime minister, he did not actually do any campaigning and it was lost without a single personal appearance by him – despite it being an underlying factor in the coalition ending.

There have been numerous mentions of Margaret in the many books on Lloyd George but normally as an appendage to her husband. This book, however, sets out her role often very independently from him. The book, for instance, cites a *Time and Tide* (a magazine produced by Viscountess Rhondda) description of Margaret as follows:

It is perfectly true to say that, had she not been

the wife of David Lloyd George, she would never have been heard of (she is in no sense an ambitious woman), but it is also true to say that as things are she really matters; as the wife of the premier, she is in her quiet way, one of the personalities and powers of today.

The book indicates time and time again what an extensive campaigner and politician she was in her own right. Heading, running and fundraising for many charities and notable causes, by 1920 she had managed to raise some quarter of a million pounds, more than ten million in today's money – something which led to her becoming a Dame in August 1920. We later learn that Margaret Lloyd George in fact took on so much work that it could be the cause of irritation about her inability to attend engagements. One such instance was the Croydon Women's Liberal Association's putting down a motion of censure against Margaret – their president – for never attending their AGMs.

As well as correspondence between Margaret and JTR, O'Brien provides numerous examples throughout the book of Margaret's speeches and how they were amended against the final version. As a result, there are probably a hundred examples of quotable 'Margaret' that are, in many ways, equal to those of her husband. For example:

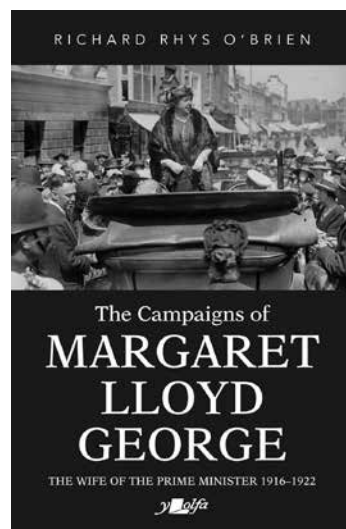
Power is one thing to possess, political wisdom is quite another.

Women have won the right to vote. We must now see that they vote right.

Both quotes are from a speech shortly before the armistice in 1918 to the Welsh Temperance Association in London, and the book is littered with many other notable political quotations from Margaret.

The overall style of the book is that O'Brien sets the historical context and chronological flow that underpins the excerpts from his various sources. We see campaigning in its full flow concerning a number of events that today seem of little relevance but a century ago were at the political forefront: the controversy over temperance in Wales, the events associated with Welsh disestablishment, and the campaigns against tuberculosis.

During the period in which this book is set, Lloyd George was gaining constant criticism for heading a coalition government that was centrally Conservative. Yet from the book we know that, when she addressed the Northern Council of Coalition Liberals in Newcastle in December 1920, Margaret declared, 'I was born a Liberal and I hope to live and die a Liberal.' To her, Liberalism had not been diluted. Yet the book spends some time on



the two different Liberal factions in parliament combating each other. This comes to the forefront in two chapters on the battle between the Lloyd George coalition Liberals and the Asquithian Liberals – and no other opponents – in the 1921 Cardiganshire by-election. Here coalition Liberal Margaret fearlessly campaigned directly against the Asquithian Bonham Carters, and a coalition Liberal victory was gained. Although the Asquithian Liberals retook the seat at the next election.

The gist of the book is that Margaret acts in a public political role as a de facto David Lloyd George, heading the coalition Liberals' political campaigns, including by-elections. For those studying the politics of this period, the book is a gem of first-hand experience. We can learn much more about the role women played within both the Liberal Party and

politics as a whole. It illustrates how political spin and 'false news' have been around for well over a century and were part and parcel of most political campaigns. We can see, for example, from first-hand examples the campaigning rhetoric that the Liberals were using against the Labour Party that linked them directly to the chaos evolving in the Russian Revolution.

The book indicates that, as well as being a key campaigning figure, Margaret also played a central role in a 'ceremonial, waving the coalition government flag sense'. As such, she was certainly the most political of the prime ministers' wives in the UK in the twentieth century. So, why didn't she become an MP herself? O'Brien also deals with some of the speculation around this in the penultimate chapter of the book.

As the title of the book indicates, this narrative is centrally about the 'campaigns' of Margaret Lloyd George through the correspondence with her private secretary, the Rev. J. T. Rhys. As a result, although you do get a clearer indication of her own personal political drive and motivations, particularly in the final chapters of the books, this is not a book that provides the reader with Margaret's thoughts about her husband or any other political or royal figures to any great extent. This is not a 'tell-all, revelations and scandal text': it is a detailed and valuable

account of not only how the first interwar coalition government sought to campaign for the Lloyd George side but also how one of the most 'forgotten figures' – Margaret Lloyd George – demonstrated that it was far from being solely a man's world.

When I wrote *The Welsh Liberals* in 2014, there was very little material available on the role of Liberal women in politics in Wales. This book would have been an invaluable source and would have helped balance some of the historical record that often portrays Welsh politics as almost totally excluding females prior to the

1980s. Therefore, those seeking a more balanced view of history will find this a fascinating and detailed read. There is also a pictorial element to the book, with many relevant photographs and some examples of the written material that O'Brien used as the central source for this book.

Professor Russell Deacon is a visiting professor and lecturer at the University of South Wales. He is also chair of the Lloyd George Society and author of The Welsh Liberals: The history of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties in Wales (Welsh Academic Press, 2014).

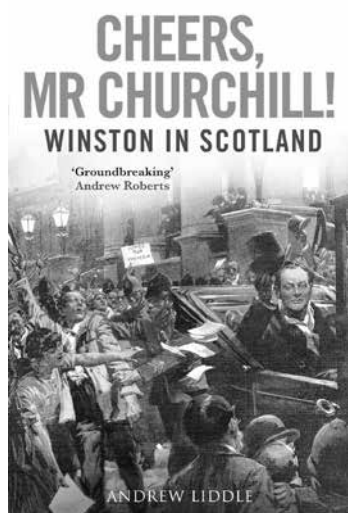
Churchill in Scotland

Andrew Liddle, *Cheers Mr Churchill: Winston in Scotland* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2022)

Review by **Ian Cawood**

AFTER HIS DEFECTION from the Unionists over Free Trade in 1904, Winston Churchill had been made a junior minister, following the Liberal landslide of 1906. With his gift for self-publicity, he had quickly been spotted by Asquith and was appointed as President of the Board of Trade in April 1908. Under the terms of a long standing convention, in order to enter the Cabinet Churchill had to seek re-election from his constituency in Manchester North-West,

which was by no means a safe seat. Seen as a traitor to the Unionist cause, the Conservatives put up the hard-right William Joynson-Hicks as an opponent and defeated Churchill, risking his political future. Immediately after the sensational result was known, the Dundee Liberal Association telegraphed Churchill and offered him the candidature in the east Scottish city. In this way, Winston Churchill began an association with Dundee that would last until his defeat in the general



election of 1922 which in turn contributed to his return to the Unionist fold in 1924.

That Churchill's Liberal years saw him having to engage with a distinctly Scottish political culture is one of the few aspects of his much-studied life that has been largely overlooked. Now Andrew Liddle, an Edinburgh journalist and former spin doctor for the Scottish Labour Party, has published a book that seeks to put a spotlight on Churchill's relationship with Scotland in the early part of the twentieth century and Scotland's relationship with the man chosen by a 2002 BBC poll as the greatest Briton in modern history.

Liddle's journalistic experience is evident in the quality of the writing. There are vivid pen portraits of Churchill in moments of despair, magnanimity and resignation which may be unfamiliar to those accustomed to

Churchill's depiction as a pugnacious and resilient bulldog. Liddle's engagement with political history in its fullest spectrum also shines through. Although particularly interested in demonstrating Churchill's sincere commitment to improving the lives of ordinary people, Liddle is no doctrinaire left wing historian. He offers the reader the perspective of almost all the politicians and activists who we encounter. Figures such as the fanatical Edwin Scrymgeour, the Scottish prohibitionist who stood against Churchill in every one of the six elections he fought in Dundee until he finally defeated him, come across as complex, principled characters. Scrymgeour's relentless battle with the brewing industry cannot be easily explained to a 21st century readership – especially to a Scottish one where the alcohol industry now stands triumphant as one of the chief sponsors of almost aspect of cultural life in the country, even while levels of Scottish alcoholism still exceed those of most other western European nations – but Liddle succeeds in eliciting admiration for the only MP to be elected on a prohibitionist platform in Britain's history and explaining how temperance was a crucial feature of Scottish radicalism long into the twentieth century.¹

Nevertheless, there are places where it would have been wise for Liddle to have

supplanted his focus on personality with a little greater appreciation of the social and cultural context of the events in both Dundee and beyond. The electoral culture, about which we hear so much, changed significantly between 1908 and 1922, generally due to the expansion of the electorate and particularly because of the enfranchisement of women. There is a dramatic shift from the confrontational and frequently violent campaigns which Liddle describes Churchill fighting in pre-war Dundee to the post-war culture of press battles and public courtesy, yet this passes largely unremarked.² Similarly, the decision of most Liberal and Unionist politicians such as Asquith, Bonar Law and Baldwin to avoid mocking and dismissing Labour opponents, for fear of exacerbating the class conflict which led to the violence on the streets of Glasgow in 1919 ought to have been noted as it has been ably described by the contributors to the 2013 collection, *The Aftermath of Suffrage*.³ Not least because Churchill failed to take the same approach, frequently treating Labour and Communist opponents with equal disdain, and using language such as 'the foul baboonery of Bolshevism' to condemn both the Soviet regime and those on the left who showed any sympathy with the new regime in Russia.⁴ Lloyd George complained

that, unlike the more pragmatic approach of his Conservative and National Liberal colleagues, Churchill had ‘Bolshevism on the brain’ and it was thus his shift to the right, in contrast to the national shift to the centre ground of politics, which contributed to his defeat in 1922.⁵

As a journalist, Liddle may also have appreciated the services of a good sub-editor who would have asked him to avoid repeating certain facts – we are told recurrently that Churchill was MP for Dundee for fourteen years, that he fought six elections in the city and that he regarded Dundee as a ‘life seat’. There is also a degree of repetition in Liddle’s style of introducing the episodes which comprise most of the chapters. We usually meet a figure alone, waiting, walking or travelling, which enables Liddle to paint a pen portrait of the figure, their state of mind and the fate which awaits them. When used initially to describe Churchill waiting in Dundee’s Caird Hall for the constituency result in 1922 which he finally lost to Scrymgeour, he effectively conveys Churchill’s state of apathetic resignation, but the approach does become a little wearing when, by chapter 25, we are told of the mood of the Dundee councillor who proposed giving Churchill the freedom of the city in 1943 (which the then Prime Minister controversially turned down). As an

academic historian, part of me recoils from any attempt to ascribe emotions to these real people, to treat them like characters in a (rather tortuous) fictional narrative. I can forgive this in Churchill’s case, as his correspondence, mainly to Clementine, has been unsurprisingly well conserved and does contain much detail as to his emotional condition. To claim that Councillor Blackwood was ‘anxious’ and ‘uneasy’ when he tried to persuade Dundee’s council to grant the honour to Churchill, however, does seem an attempt to fill a historical text with questionable invention.

Nevertheless, this is a highly readable account of an overlooked period of British political history during which, if one reads between the lines of Liddle’s text, a modern political culture emerged which has, at least until the takeover of Britain by the cabal of Oxford Tories in 2010, proved remarkably resilient.

Dr Ian Cawood is Associate Professor in British Political &

Religious History at the University of Stirling. He is the author of The Liberal Unionist Party: A History (I B Tauris, 2012).

- 1 See also T. A. Stewart, “‘Vote as You Pray’ – The Success of the Scottish Prohibitionist Party in Dundee during the Interwar Period’, *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 13:2 (2018), pp. 105–17
- 2 J. Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War’, *Past and Present*, 190:1 (2006), pp. 185–216.
- 3 J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (eds), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics, 1918–1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 4 W. Churchill at the Mansion House, 19 February 1919, quoted in R. Rhodes James (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897–1963*, vol. 3, 1914–1922 (Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), p. 2670.
- 5 George Riddell’s diary entry for 11 April 1919, quoted in R. H. Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War, November 1918–February 1920* (Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 153.

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Letters to the Editor

Lib Dems in the Cities

I took out a subscription to the *Journal* only to find I was already part of living history.

Michael Meadowcroft's analysis of Liberal Democrat performance in the large cities ('Lib Dems in the cities', *Journal of Liberal History* 117, winter 2022–23) suggests the party's prospects in my own city, Birmingham, are 'depressing' – in spite of our making significant gains of four seats against Labour in 2022.

In discussing Birmingham, he might of course have ranged further in Liberal history as, of all the metropolitan cities, we are unique in having a large Conservative base dating back to the defection of the Chamberlain family from the Liberals. Indeed, the city has been run, unassisted, by the Conservatives in recent memory.

His numerical analysis implies that our gains in 2022 were purely localised and his overall analysis, reasonably, questioned what the Liberal Democrats in the 2020s have to offer the large cities and whether the party has the capacity to take power again in these places. The large electoral wards in Birmingham are certainly tough going for community politicians and even tougher for those seeking to follow party handbooks on electioneering.

However, the Birmingham gains were not just the result of localised 'trench' campaigns

but were underpinned by the city party's approach to the diversity and difficulties of urban life – and offer the party some indication of the direction it might take. Of the new group of 12, five are of Asian heritage and two are Muslim women.

The Liberal Democrats were the only party to have a council candidate of Somali heritage. This diverse council group operates – and operated before 2022 – as an effective team, challenging Labour's neglect of the city's diverse neighbourhoods. The 2022 Birmingham manifesto was genuinely radical and clear-sighted and developed by the party's membership. For instance, we were the only party to advocate congestion charging – but with the proceeds becoming part of a programme of localised action in response to climate change rather than, as is normal in urban planning, going to big projects.

In the end, history will judge whether the prospects are now as depressing as Michael indicates. However, Birmingham was the birthplace of urban Liberalism and may be part of its rebirth.

Jon Hunt (Birmingham group leader 2016–23)

Colin Coote

I was interested to see the reference to Colin Coote as a 'moderate coalition Unionist

MP' In K.O. Morgan's article on 'Lloyd George and the hard-faced men 1918–22' in the recent special issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 119, summer 2023). It is worth correcting the record, I think, to advise that Colin Coote was in fact the Coalition Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely, elected unopposed in 1918 and then losing to the Tories in 1922 when both the Conservatives and Labour stood against him. Interestingly, he had replaced one of Rosebery's sons, Neil Primrose, unopposed, at a by-election as MP for Wisbech in 1917 after the former was killed in action in Palestine. Coote was later editor of the *Daily Telegraph* between 1950 and 1964.

Coote produced a memoir called 'Editorial' which contains on pages 108 to 109 his description of the episode with Frank Hodges that Morgan referred to in the article.

Malcolm Baines

Peter Hain

It is a pity that the *Journal* devoted so much newsprint to the article by Peter Hain ('Stop the Tour!', *Journal of Liberal History* 118, spring 2023). I found the article to be somewhat geared to self-promotion and interest and lacked any objectivity. When all is said and done, the protest was anything other than peaceful. Liberal principles do not encompass criminal activity.

David Yates

What have the Liberals ever done for us?

Launch of our latest publication – a concise guide to the greatest Liberal achievements, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries.

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Chair: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**. Special book price for meeting participants!



8.15pm, Saturday 24 September

Meyrick Suite, Bournemouth International Centre (conference pass needed)

Those unable to attend in person will be able to view the meeting via Zoom – register for online access via the History Group website (<https://liberalhistory.org.uk/events/>).

William Gladstone and the Question of Slavery, 1832–33

Continued from page 31

- 96 John Gladstone publicly labelled Wilberforce a ‘well-meaning but mistaken man’, while Wilberforce privately complained of opposition from the ‘Liverpool Gladstone Connection’. John Gladstone, Letter to the *Liverpool Courier*, 5 November 1823, in *Correspondence between John Gladstone and James Cropper on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States of America* (West India Association, 1824), p. 17; [9 October 1827], Wilberforce Diary, Wilberforce Diaries Project, <https://wilberforcediariesproject.com/>. My thanks to Professor John Coffey for this reference.
- 97 3 July 1833, *GD*, 2:52.
- 98 William Gladstone to Andrew Fairbairn, 15 October 1893, in Lathbury, ed. *Correspondence on Church and Religion*, 2:333.
- 99 William Gladstone to Samuel Wilberforce, 25 April 1838, Bodleian Library, MSS Wilberforce d. 35, ff. 7b–8b.
- 100 Henry Manning, 13 December 1882, in Peter C. Erb, *The Correspondence of Henry Edward Manning and William Ewart Gladstone*, 4 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4:4.
- 101 William Gladstone, ‘1833–4 in the Old House of Commons’, 3 June 1897, in *PMP*, 1:54–55.
- Gladstone never imagined that he was ‘opposing’ emancipation. See *PMP*, 1:41.
- 102 William Gladstone, ‘Last Words on the County Franchise’ [1878], reprinted in *Gleanings of Past Years*, 7 vols. (John Murray, 1879), 1:178.
- 103 Cited in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 259.
- 104 Poly Stancheva and Diana Dukovska, ‘Bulgarian Ambassador Asks London Mayor to Rethink Renaming of Gladstone Park’, 21 April 2022, Bulgarian News Agency, <https://www.bta.bg/en/news/bulgaria/255087-bulgarian-ambassador-in-london-asks-london-mayor-to-rethink-renaming-of-gladston>