of John Stuart Mill, and its wording was honed by Barbara, Jessie Boucherett and Emily Davies. Mill, MP for Westminster, had agreed to present the petition to parliament if there were over one hundred women signatories, in the event, there were 1,521, achieved in a matter of weeks. The petition was presented to the Commons by Mill in front of a packed Ladies' Gallery. However, as Robinson notes, Barbara was absent, perhaps because of her illegitimacy. It is her absences, as well as her commanding contributions which form a key motif to the biography.

Her name was also missing from the executive committee formed to establish the first college for women at the University of Cambridge, although she was the major donor and an equal driving force along with Emily Davies. Barbara ultimately succeeded in her desire to locate the college from distant Hitchin to Girton on the outskirts of Cambridge. She donated paintings and furnishings and also left the college £10,000 in her will, which safeguarded its future. Barbara's influence on future feminists thankful for her activism and achievements led to Irene Baker and Lesley Abdela repairing her grave in Brightling in 2007 and Girton College recognising her key founding role, along with Emily Davies, with a blue plaque, unveiled by Baroness Hale in 2019. Barbara's important legacy is not directly addressed in the biography perhaps because it runs counter to the view that she has been erased from history.

The book is lavishly illustrated with colour plates and black and white sketches demonstrating Barbara's skill as a professional artist as well as depicting aspects of her life, family and friendship circle. Many have come from the private archive of Barbara's descendants and provide powerful visual insights into, especially, her personal life. They also serve as a reminder that in her art, as with other aspects of her life, Barbara was a campaigner and activist. She helped to establish the Society for Female Artists and petitioned the Royal Academy to admit women students. Robinson notes that her bequest of her watercolours to the Tate was refused, which means that much of her work is now lost.

Trailblazer is a highly readable commemoration of an extraordinary woman. It focuses most attention on Barbara's personal unconventional connections: with her father, her aunts, her eccentric husband, and her friends and protégés. This means that coverage of some of her feminist projects are compressed. However, the biography does much to remind us of the eclectic, colourful and pioneering lives of many female Victorian campaigners which run counter to dominant views of strait-laced, retiring, pious individuals. It is important that the contributions of women like Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon are celebrated and remembered.

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Fifty election campaigns

Iain Dale (ed.), *British General Election Campaigns 1830–2019* (Biteback, 2024)

Review by Mark Pack

Iain Dale has carved out an impressive niche as the driving force behind a series of multi-authored compilations of political history (and alternative political histories too, exploring topics such as what if Jeremy Corbyn had become Prime Minister). His latest, *British General Election Campaigns 1830–2019*, continues his tradition of putting together highly impressive author lists for very readable volumes.

The fifty general elections in this volume are covered by 49

names, including many big-name academic stars such as Vernon Bogdanor and John Curtice, high-profile political journalists such as Sue Cameron and Adam Boulton, experts in the details of elections such as Peter Kellner and Kathryn Rix, some frontline politicians, such as Robert Buckland and David Laws (who gets to do both 1910 elections), and a clutch of others I know who I now worry will be offended for not being called out in the earlier part of this sentence [Editor – including me!! on the 1906 election].

That cast list demonstrates both the book's strength and the restrictions of the format. Each individual chapter stands well on its own. They do each tend to reflect their author's own expertise and, in the case of those politically active, their political backgrounds. That can make for a somewhat inconsistent read, as different chapters have differing takes on the same people and events that span more than one election. It also means there is some duplication, with the Tamworth Manifesto making more than one appearance, for example, even though it was the manifesto for just the one election. Yet it also means that for such controversial figures as Benjamin Disraeli the reader gets both the hagiography and the criticism, making for a more informative overall read.

Each chapter stands well on its own, making it a good book for dipping in and out of. Each author, understandably, tends to like ending their chapter with an assessment of how important their own election was, with as a result the book taking you through an impressively long list of electoral firsts. Some especially stand out, with Robert Saunders making a particularly good case for the 1886 election being at least as important as those of 1945 or 1979 in reshaping British politics for the long term.

Each chapter gives a good basic grounding in knowing what happened in the run-up to and during each general election. Analytical controversies, such as the impact of the Sheffield rally speech in the 1992 general election, are often treated briefly, so the interested reader will often be prompted to turn elsewhere for more information. That is though, in my book, a sign of a good introductory reference guide as this book aims to be.

Although the book has an enjoyable preface by Iain Dale himself, reflecting in part on his own attempts to win an election, it does not have a scene-setter to tell the newer reader just how different many elements of elections were in 1832 – the big role of uncontested seats, for example, or the different electoral dynamics of multi member first-past-the-post constituencies, or public voting over multiple days or the absence of financial controls. It is therefore a bit of a bumpy and inconsistent ride in the early chapters to learn about just how different elections were back then.

The unwary reader may therefore also be taken in by the apparent surgical precision of the voting and MP statistics given for early general elections, giving figures to one decimal place as if counting up how many votes each party secured is a matter of simple maths rather than a complex set of judgements requiring decisions over which party to allocate candidates to, how to cater for uncontested seats, what to do with under-voting in multi-member seats or the simplest but most annoying of problems for the electoral researcher – how many basic numbers vary between different sources. And that is without getting into the special issues with trying to calculate turnout figures …

As that approach to electoral statistics reflects, this is not a book to turn to for revealing

new details or unorthodox viewpoints. Such questionable facts as whether Palmerston ever did really say the famous line about the Schleswig-Holstein question (the earliest sources crediting it to him came after his death) are presented as if definitely true. But this is the conventional wisdom of such political history being presented, so it would be unduly harsh to call it wrong. Rather, it is just that the truth, on both electoral numbers and that quote, is less certain than most readers will think from the book.

However, the book is nicely rounded off by a concluding chapter on how campaigning has changed in recent general elections, providing a handy summary of the changing realities and political science theories and showing the continued importance of some – though only some – of the traditional election campaign techniques that would have been familiar to those standing in the very first election in this volume.

Dr Mark Pack is President of the Liberal Democrats, and has worked or volunteered for the party in various roles at each general election since 1992.

For a reader offer for *British General Elections 1830–2019*, see page 2 of this Journal.

Forgotten Scot

Lachlan Munro, *R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Scotland: Party, Prose and Political Aesthetic* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022)
Review by Ian Cawood

In 1927, at the height of his fame, an article in the *Sunday Post* noted that 'there are few men nowadays so well known as Mr R. B. Cunninghame Graham', yet on the anniversary of his birth in 1952, the Scottish poet and songwriter Hamish Henderson asked, 'Who remembers Cunninghame Graham?' Lachlan Munro's new biographical study, the tenth written (so far), attempts to explain why the man, known variously as 'Don Roberto', 'King Robert IV' (he claimed descent from Robert II) and 'the modern Don Quixote', was so famous in his age, drawing on a political and professional life of dizzying activity, but who seems to have been forgotten within a decade of his death in 1936. He attributes Cunninghame Graham's current obscurity to the contradictory nature of his various careers – a romantic adventurer who was also a firebrand socialist (he was jailed for his involvement in the Trafalgar Square riot in 1887), a committed internationalist who co-founded the Scottish National Party.

Munro's study is divided into three parts: his first career as a radical Liberal under the Conservative minority government of Lord Salisbury; the literary career that he forged after failing to be re-elected in 1892; and finally, the impact of the First World War on his subsequent campaign for Scottish home rule. Within this structure, certain themes are brought out – Cunninghame Graham's attitude towards the working class, towards the British empire (then at its peak of popularity in Britain), and towards Scotland as it entered the twentieth century. Sadly, the result is sometimes highly frustrating. Many of the chapters are less than ten pages in length and feature digressions into the literary and political context of the age, rather than focusing on Cunninghame Graham's significance. For example, there are two chapters each in parts one and two on 'Empire' and 'Colonialism', when it would have been far more advisable to have one single substantial chapter. Part three does have a chapter on 'Empire and Colonialism', but