

Liberal History News

Spring 2025

Adrian Slade (25 May 1936 – 24 January 2025)

Adrian Slade had three strings to his bow: a successful advertising executive, a fine entertainer, and a long-term Liberal colleague. The three regularly overlapped, not least when he became the life and soul of the party at the Liberal Party's end-of-assembly Glee Club. He once told me of his professional debut as a solo artist when he was hired by Clement Freud for one of his nightclubs. On his first night, Freud came forward to introduce his nervous artiste and simply said, 'This is Adrian Slade – he does things with a piano.' This aspect of his life followed his time as president of the Cambridge Footlights when, it is alleged, he recruited Peter Cook but turned down David Frost. His piano was part of his personality and went with him into the care home in which he spent his last years.

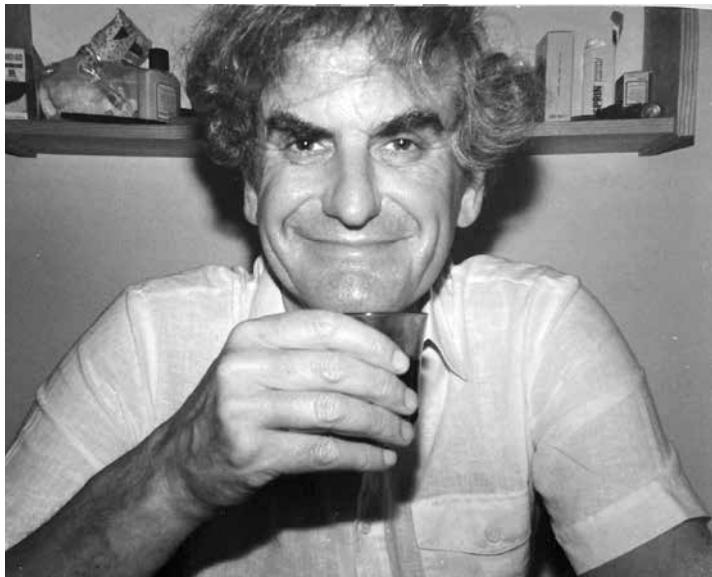
His father, George Penkavil Slade, known as 'Pen', was a barrister who died when Adrian was 6 years old; his mother, Mary Albinia Alice Carnegie lived to the age of 92. Adrian was sent to Eton at the age of 13. Adrian's three elder siblings were all distinguished: his sister, Pauline was awarded the MBE for her

work in the voluntary sector; one brother, Christopher, was a Lord Justice of Appeal; and his other brother, Julian, was a composer. From 1960, Adrian was employed by leading PR agencies before founding his own company in 1971. He was responsible for the 1979 general election poster showing David Steel poised above Margaret Thatcher and Jim Callaghan, each of the latter pointing guns in opposite directions.

Adrian was one of that considerable band of 'Grimond Liberals' who were drawn into Liberal politics by the charismatic and intellectually rigorous Liberal leader, Jo Grimond. Adrian joined the party in 1963 and was its candidate in Putney at the 1966 election, polling just 10 per cent of the vote. He fought the seat twice more: in February 1974, doubling the Liberal vote; and, again, in October 1974, polling 15 per cent. At the 1987 general election, he contested Wimbledon coming second with 27.5 per cent of the vote. Between these parliamentary elections, in 1981 he won Richmond for the Greater London Council, the only Liberal success, but was soon joined by two Labour to SDP defectors,

plus Mike Tuffrey's by-election victory in 1985, and became leader of the Alliance group, until Margaret Thatcher abolished the authority in 1986. Following his victory, he went to see Ken Livingstone, the GLC's Labour leader, to discuss what committees he should sit on, and they also discussed where he should sit in the council chamber so as to annoy the Conservatives the most.

Following his 1981 election victory, the Conservatives launched a legal petition alleging errors in his election expenses return. The court did not unseat him but found two technicalities which resulted in legal expenses of around £50,000. Adrian's many friends rallied round, and a star-studded cast of former Footlights colleagues appeared in 'An Evening at Court' in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on 23 January 1983, to raise funds for Adrian. Among those appearing were John Cleese, Peter Cook, Angela Thorne, French and Saunders, the Goodies, Eleanor Bron and John Fortune. Adrian also recorded his brilliant – and often scurrilous – party Assembly songs and published them as 'Party Pieces', on sale for his appeal.



In 1987 he was elected as Liberal Party president and became the last to serve as such. As president, he was a member of the Liberal team that negotiated the merger with the SDP from September 1988 to January 1989. His personal contributions included proposing 'The Democrats' as the name for the new party; when this was rejected, he then

suggested 'The Alliance'. These initiatives were perverse, as a number of Liberal parliamentarians had clearly stated that they were not prepared to join a party that did not have the word 'Liberal' in its title. He spoke in favour of the merger at the special assembly in Blackpool on 23 January 1988. He was awarded the CBE in 1988.

Between 2002 and 2011, Adrian carried out an important series of lengthy interviews with key Liberal Democrat parliamentarians for the *Journal of Liberal History*. He also interviewed Ludovic Kennedy, who had fought the significant Rochdale by-election of 1958, and the Russian Liberal, Grigory Yavlinsky, president of the Yabloko party. The full interviews are held in the archive of the journal.

Adrian was married to Sue for 64 years and was a great family man, treating family occasions with the same exuberant conviviality that characterised his political activities. His passions for cricket, football, food, wine and theatre, involved all the family: daughter Nicola, son Rupert and grandchildren, Kath, Hanna and Lara. ■

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983–87, and a member of the Liberal negotiating team on merger with the SDP in 1987–88.

Jenny Randerson, Baroness Randerson (26 May 1948 – 4 January 2025)

When the political history of the first quarter of this century is accurately written I believe that one of the most influential Welsh politicians will be recognised as the much loved and widely admired Liberal Jenny Randerson.

Like David Lloyd George and other famous politicians elected in Wales, Jenny Randerson was born in England. She moved to

Cardiff in 1974 to teach and then from 1976 to 1999 lecture on economics and politics. Jenny's introduction to politics came through a knock on her door by a canvasser for Mike German, 1979 Cardiff North candidate. Both she and husband Peter volunteered to deliver leaflets. By 1983 Jenny became the fourth Cardiff city Liberal councillor – winning a by-election with her campaign

to clean up the unhealthy council Roath Park Lake.

As councillor from 1983 until 1999, including as opposition leader, Jenny was central to the Cardiff Liberal presence growing to 35 councillors, holding the council leadership from 2004 to 2012 and electing Jenny Willott as Cardiff Central MP from 2005 to 2015. Jenny was the Welsh Liberal Democrats' chair from 1988 to 1990.



In 1999 elected for Cardiff Central, Jenny was one of the 'history girls and boys' elected to the first democratic Welsh Assembly. Jenny's Senedd time, particularly as a minister, were her glory years. Two more firsts followed within 18 months – minister in the first Welsh coalition government and the first female UK Liberal Democrat minister, for Culture (arts, libraries and museums), Sport, the Welsh language and other languages spoken in Wales, and for nearly a year also Acting Deputy First Minister to Rhodri Morgan.

Wales's public museums became free to enter (soon emulated by Westminster) from April 2001, with 160,000 visitors to the national museums during April, 78 per cent more than the same month the previous year. In January 2002, funding and location for the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff's answer to the

Sydney Opera House, was confirmed. In 2002 and 2003 'Iaith Pawb – Everyone's language' was introduced and the National Action Plan for Bilingual Wales announced. In 2003 583,000 (20 per cent) spoke Welsh. By 2021, 892,000 (28 per cent) spoke Welsh. Jenny was re-elected to Cardiff Bay in 2003 and 2007.

Appointed to the Lords in 2011, if the twelve Senedd years were her glory days, the remaining fourteen years were the golden days, the jam-jar campaigner against filthy water transformed into the beautiful energetic team-playing lady of the lake in her title. This included over two and a half years as Lords minister for Wales and for much of this time also for Northern Ireland – one of only two colleagues to have ever served (so far!) in coalition governments with both Labour and Conservatives. Jenny made an enormous 1,641 parliamentary contributions: as Wales minister pre-eminently steering major devolution proposals into the Wales Act 2014, often sparring with other long-time Senedd colleagues; as Northern Ireland minister – with huge commitment, sensitivity and wisdom – she had to deal with the flags dispute and public sector strikes but also helped to deliver the Stormont House agreement. And, for the record, when Jenny was a UK minister for Wales and Northern Ireland, only Wales and Ireland won the Six Nations!

Then in opposition from spring 2015 Jenny was Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Wales, arguing for a UK constitutional convention, and from September 2015 over nine magisterial years spokesperson for transport. Jenny's mastery of the brief knew no bounds.

Jenny was a magistrate from 1982 until 1999. She worked with Cardiff Metropolitan University and then, from 2017, as Pro Chancellor, and then a very active Chancellor, of Cardiff University from 2019 until her death. She was also involved in a wide variety of local charities, including Wales Council for Deaf People, Hepatitis C Trust, Cardiff and Vale Youth Wind Band and African Mothers' Foundation.

Jenny Randerson was a force of nature, but always a true people-person, hugely loved and everywhere admired as the very best of role models and public servants, and always encouraging, mentoring and supporting, particularly women and the young. Jenny was also the most self-deprecating of politicians, but as effective as anybody who has held office in government. Jenny's Liberalism never wavered but she always worked with all who shared her goals. Described as 'a titan of Welsh politics', 'a tower of a human being', Jenny was also a lovely and convivial friend and colleague. She showed that collaboration and courtesy, combined with determination, hard work,

intelligence, principle, vision and warmth, can secure huge change for the better. Jenny is survived by much loved Peter, son James, daughter Eleri, and three grandchildren.

Her legacy for Liberalism and Wales will for certain outlive us all. In Wales, if you seek Jenny's monument, look around the museums, listen to the music and the Welsh language and read the words. And remember her.

Jenny cariad, roedd neb fel yr chi. There was no one like you. ■

Simon Hughes was MP for Bermondsey & Old Southwark 1983–2015. He is now Chancellor of South Bank University.

History Group on Bluesky

For many years the Liberal Democrat History Group has published daily 'on this day in Liberal history' posts on Twitter/X (@LibHistory-Today); we also use this account to post news of our meetings and publications. We are now also publishing the posts on Bluesky (@libhistorytoday.bsky.social) – please follow us there. ■

Corrigenda

In Alan Mumford's review of Robert Harris's book, *Precipice* (*Journal of Liberal History* 125, winter 2024–25), the statement that Asquith wrote more than 600 letters to Venetia Stanley is incorrect: the number should have been 550. ■

Letters to the Editor

Ramsay Muir

I am a great admirer of Ramsay Muir and I have just about all of his political publications. Probably more than anyone, he saved the Liberal Party from disintegration in the 1930s. By trade he was an academic historian. After a distinguished academic career he ended up as Professor of Modern History at Manchester University but he resigned his chair in 1921 to concentrate full-time on Liberal politics. He was a prolific writer and one of the founders of the influential Liberal Summer School in 1921. He was the key figure in the streamlining of the party organisation in 1936 and was the main author of the preamble to its constitution – which has survived with minor updating to the present day. He was successful only once in his eight election contests – for Rochdale in the short 1923–24 parliament, but, like many academics, was not a particular success in the very different debating chamber.

Recently, in the course of researching the background to Middle East political history I came across a booklet reproducing a 'Ramsay Muir Memorial Lecture' given at Cambridge University in 1956, and published by the Ramsay Muir Educational

Trust. Further research produced references to a number of other memorial lectures in the 1950s and early 1960s but nothing later. Nor does the Trust figure on the current register of charities. Can any of our readers throw any light on either the lectures or the Trust, and particularly when either ceased operating? ■

Michael Meadowcroft

Declaration of Arbroath

William Wallace's splendid article on 'The Origins of Liberalism' (*Journal of Liberal History* 124, winter 2024–25) notes Rainsborough's 1647 argument that 'every man that is to live under a Government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that Government'. This notion of government by consent is one of the foundation stones of Liberalism and its origins can be traced even further back. Notable among its antecedents is the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320. This was a plea to the Pope for support from Scottish nobles who held that their country was being oppressed by Edward II of England.

The Declaration states that 'the due consent and assent of us all