

The Aldenham Road

This road had a pavement only 2' 6" wide in places. When a mother took a toddler to school with a baby in a pram, either she or the toddler had to walk in the heavily trafficked road feeding into the M1. Bushey Liberals encouraged the formation of, and were involved in, a non party Aldenham Road Committee to draw up plans and pressure the UDC, the County Council and the Ministry to take remedial action. Eventually the Tory-led authorities caved in and agreed to the Committee's proposals.

King George Recreation Ground Children's Play Area

The Play Area was in a state of complete disrepair, the paddling pool full of broken glass and debris and the grass surround fouled by dogs. Two Liberal councillors encouraged residents to raise a petition. Hundreds of signatures were obtained by concerned parents who had no party affiliation. The petition was presented to the council

by a Liberal councillor. The pressure from the petitioners eventually enabled the councillors to secure necessary improvements.

Malcolm Baines

I was delighted to see the biography of J. M. Hogge in issue 30 of the *Journal*. Hogge, like Vivian Phillipps and Donald Maclean, has been seen as one of the small band of Asquithians who tried to keep a separate Liberal identity following their titular leader's defeat in the 1918 election, and his career is well worth looking at more closely.

However, Ian Elder's overview of Hogge's career omits some of the tension there was between Hogge and the other Asquithian leaders, and underplays his role in promoting a reunion with Lloyd George's Coalition Liberals after the 1922 election. C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian* and a major Liberal figure of the time, refers in his diary to Hogge's low opinion of Asquith, his surreptitious

meetings with Lloyd George and to his opinion that Liberal radicals would welcome Lloyd George back without any reservations providing he severed his Tory links.

He also refers to the derogatory view that many Asquithians had of Hogge – often linked to what were perceived as his rather loose morals. C. F. G. Masterman described him as a vulgar lowland Scot in the pay of Lloyd George, whilst Herbert Gladstone claimed that he was frequently drunk and had run off to Scotland with a House of Commons waitress. Many leading Asquithians spent the 1922 election campaign expecting the scandal to break in the newspapers.

Altogether, although exposure in the press was, I think, avoided, Hogge's political activities during the crucial immediate post-war years showed that despite his appointment as the Asquithians' joint chief whip he always remained something of both a social outsider and a political maverick.

Reviews

The party leader who never was

Mark Pottle (ed): *Champion Redoubtable: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1914–1945* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998; 418pp)

Reviewed by **Malcolm Baines**

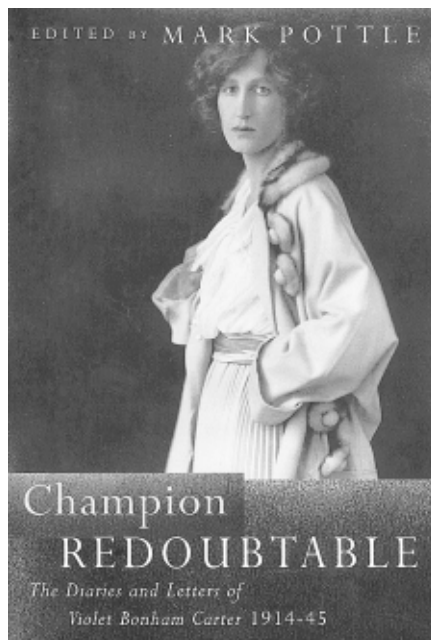
Despite the existence of the Lady Violet Room at the National Liberal Club, Violet Bonham Carter – in common with most Liberal figures between Lloyd George and Jo Grimond – has not had the recognition of her contribution to twentieth-century Liberalism that she deserved.

The publication of the three volumes of her diaries and letters has begun to remedy this. All three volumes provide a fascinating insight into the character of a Liberal at the heart

of both national life and the party from 1904 onwards. The first, *Lantern Slides*, covering the period to 1914, provides a portrait of upper-class life in the halcyon era of Edwardian England, while the last, *Daring to Hope* (reviewed opposite by David Dutton) is a moving account of how Violet Bonham Carter struggled to keep the Liberal flame alive in the post-war period.

This review is of the middle volume, *Champion Redoubtable*, which is concerned with the years from 1914 to

1945. The title comes from a quotation from Winston Churchill's *Great Contemporaries*, in which he describes Lady Violet as a champion redoubtable for her father, H. H. Asquith. The volume is not, however, focused primarily on Asquith, who died in 1928, less than half-way through its time-span, but rather on the two world wars. There is a little on Violet Bonham Carter's visits to Germany and Ireland in the aftermath of the First World War, and on her role in Asquith's election campaigns in Paisley. However, the 1920s as a whole receive only cursory coverage, and the 1930s an outline summary only. This makes the second volume the least satisfactory of the three because there is no coherent narrative, reflecting Mark Pottle's decision to focus on Lady Violet as a public rather than a private person. Consequently, he has ignored the bulk of the interwar period when she herself was preoccupied with her 'journal of motherhood'. This was the record that she kept of her children growing up, and its exclusion detracts from our understanding of her as a



person. Indeed, the reader finds this volume a little disjointed because there is no real sense of the progression from a young unmarried woman of twenty-seven in 1914 to a grandmother in 1938. This dysfunction is paralleled by a similarly sharp move from the governing Liberal Party of Asquith and Lloyd George at the opening of the volume to its divided remnants painfully reassembling themselves at the close to fight a post-war election.

However, *Champion Redoubtable* does give an insight into the byways of the Liberal Party's decline through the life of Violet Bonham Carter. In particular, there are some lively accounts of the Paisley campaigns of Asquith in the early 1920s, of the impact of the coalition with the Conservatives in 1915 on Asquith, and of Lady Violet's own campaign in Wells in 1945. Most interesting of all, perhaps, is the intriguing possibility of what might have happened had she entered the Commons in 1941, of which I was certainly not aware before reading this volume. In August that year Hugh Seeley became Lord Sherwood, leaving a vacancy at Berwick-on-Tweed. Violet Bonham Carter was clearly anxious to be selected in his stead. Under the conditions of the wartime truce either Labour or the Conservatives would not have opposed her. In retrospect, this was clearly her only realistic chance of entering the Commons. Given her forceful and campaigning

character it is possible that she might have held the seat in 1945 when Beveridge lost it. One could even speculate that she would then have become leader in succession to Sinclair, as the hapless Clement Davies was no one's first choice. The local Liberals' bias against women candidates which led to George Grey (subsequently killed in Normandy) being selected may have prevented the Liberals from being the first British political party to have had a woman leader.

More interesting, though, are the accounts of Violet Bonham Carter's life in the First and Second World Wars. The reader is made very aware of the constant stream of deaths of friends and acquaintances between 1914 and 1918 by Pottle's skilful editing, including his use of biographical footnotes linking individuals to their appearances in the social whirl of pre-war upper-

class London in the first volume. Between 1939 and 1945 the accounts of the escape of Violet's son Mark from prison camp in Italy and his arrival in England, together with Lady Violet's roles as an air-raid warden and BBC Governor, make a lasting impression. It is these accounts that really bring the book to life, giving a deep insight into her character and confirming her place in the pantheon of Liberal heroes.

Overall, Mark Pottle is to be congratulated on the scholarship that has gone into his edition of the diaries and letters. Even though this volume is the weakest of the three, it deserves a place on the Liberal historian's bookshelf.

Malcolm Baines works in corporate tax for a large accountancy firm. His doctoral thesis at Oxford was on the survival of the British Liberal Party 1932-59.

A life-long espousal of Liberal values

Mark Pottle (ed): *Daring to Hope: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1946 – 1969* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2000; 431pp)

Reviewed by David Dutton

Violet Bonham Carter's political career extended from the hey-day of Victorian Liberalism, when her father H.H. Asquith was Prime Minister, to the fag-end of Harold Wilson's Labour government in the 1960s. She made her first reported speech in 1909 at the age of twenty-two. When she died sixty years later she was still espousing Liberal values, protesting against the effects of British policy in the Nigerian civil war which, she argued, was contributing to mass starvation in the province of Biafra. With the volume *Daring to Hope*, Mark Pottle completes the huge enterprise that he began, in partnership with the late Mark Bonham Carter, of editing Lady Violet's voluminous diaries. The

task has been expertly performed. This book, unusually for a published diary, is not just a book to dip into; it offers an often compelling continuous narrative. Pottle's editorial work is first-rate. I found only one footnote to which I felt exception could be taken – the suggestion that Anthony Eden made no recommendation to the Queen as to his successor when he resigned the premiership in 1957. In fact, with all the circumlocution to which his diplomatic training had conditioned him, he gave a firm – if fruitless – nudge in favour of R.A. Butler.

There are several recurring themes in this volume: Lady Violet's consistent support from the late 1940s onwards for the goal of European