

Letters to the Editor

Voices from history

I wonder if I might contribute a brief postscript to the fascinating and helpful letter from the Rev. Robert Duvall published in the Spring 2025 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*? He drew attention to two CDs ('Voices from History') published by the British Library in 2004. It may be of interest to record that I witnessed for myself two of the four speakers he mentions – I'm not sure how many of us are still around, but suspect that we are a diminishing band!

A general election was held in the spring of 1955. I happened to be on holiday in Portsmouth in April and attended, one evening, an 'Any Questions?' event staged by the Liberal Party. The four speakers included Frank Owen, whose biography of Lloyd George had been published six months earlier, and another was Lord Samuel. (I can't recall the identity of the other two, but am sure that one of them was a lady.) A few weeks later, having returned home to Woodford, a friend and I went along to Hawkey Hall on the evening of 16 May where Churchill was addressing his potential constituents. He mentioned that he always paid great attention to anything Lord Samuel had to say. He paused for a moment, and

then added ... 'He's older than I am!'

Peter Rowland

Asquith's schooling

Biographers of Asquith record that he (and his brother) spent around a year from 1861 as a boarder at the school at Fulneck, a Moravian settlement in Pudsey, between Leeds and Bradford.

An early letter to his mother is deployed by both Roy Jenkins and Markham Lester in which Asquith complained that, 'I do not like either masters or boys and therefore do not like the place at all.'¹ He also complained of the 'dreadful smoke [which] comes over from Pudsey that it makes everything quite black,'² an observation consistent with the old joke that in Pudsey the crows have learned to fly backwards to stop the smoke getting in their eyes.

In a footnote, in which he explains that the Moravians were a Protestant sect that were persecuted and consequently set up settlements in the UK, Jenkins notes that 'The boarding school at Fulneck existed from 1801 to 1884.'³

In fact, the school dated back to 1753 and continued until 2025.

Other notable pupils include the Tory MP and factory reformer, Richard Oastler, the feminist, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, and the architect, Benjamin La Trobe. Its most famous twentieth century pupil is the late actor, Dame Diana Rigg (who found it 'pretty cheerless'⁴).

In March 2025, the Trustees of the school announced its closure at the end of the summer term, citing 'a continued decline in enrolment, combined with rising operational costs.'⁵ The school is located in the constituency of the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves.

Mark Stephens

- 1 V. Markham Lester, *H. H. Asquith. Last of the Romans*, Lexington Books, 2019, p. 15; Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, Collins, 1986 [1964], p. 15
- 2 Jenkins, op cit.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Diana's naughty school days, *Daily Express*, 25 June 2007 <https://www.express.co.uk/dayandnight/11208/Diana-s-naughty-school-days>
- 5 BBC (2025) Private school to shut after 270 years of teaching, 25 March <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp8vg-4krezo#:~:text=Founded%20by%20the%20Moravian%20church,in%20pupil%20numbers%20since%202012.>