

Liberal History News

Winter 2025–26

Dick Taverne (18 October 1928 – 25 October 2025)

Dick Taverne, who has died at the age of 97 was a politician of great skill, principle and commitment.

Born in Sumatra as a Dutch national, he was naturalised as British at age 21. Educated at Charterhouse School, and then Balliol College, Oxford, he qualified as a barrister in 1954. He fought Putney for the Labour Party in the 1959 election and was elected for Lincoln in a by-election in March 1962.

He held the seat for Labour for twelve years (1962–74), including stints as a Home Office minister (1966–68) and then Treasury Minister (1968–70). He helped to launch the Institute for Fiscal Studies, now an influential think-tank, and after Labour's defeat in the 1970 election became its first Director.

With his passionate pro-European views he became more and more estranged from the growing anti-Europeanism in the

Labour Party, and when his local party in Lincoln voted in effect to deselect him, and his internal party appeals failed, he resigned from the party and formed the Lincoln Democratic Labour Association.

As a matter of principle he resigned his parliamentary seat and contested the subsequent by-election in March 1973 under the designation 'Democratic Labour'. He held the seat by 13,000, but saw his majority fall to 1,300 in the February 1974 election and lost by just under 1,000 in October 1974; the Labour victor was Margaret Jackson (later Beckett), who was to become Deputy Leader of the Labour Party under John Smith. In the same year Taverne became a member of the European Parliament, taking up one of the seats refused by the Labour Party.

He was a natural recruit to the Social Democratic Party on its formation in 1981, and served on their national committee from 1981 to 1987. He stood as an SDP candidate in the Peckham by-election in 1982, and in Dulwich in the 1983 general election. When the SDP merged with the Liberal Party he joined the new Liberal Democrats, serving on its



Federal Policy Committee 1989–90 and chairing its first economic policy working group.

In February 1996 he was created a Liberal Democrat life peer as Baron Taverne, of Pimlico in the City of Westminster. In May 2006 he was an unsuccessful candidate in local elections to Westminster Council.

He married Janice Hennessey in 1955, and had two daughters. His book *The March of Unreason* (Oxford University Press, 2005) won him the Association of British Science Writers' award as parliamentary communicator of the year. In 2014, he published

his memoir, *Against the Tide: Politics and Beyond* (Biteback, 2014), reviewed for the *Journal of Liberal History* by Tom McNally in issue 94 (spring 2017).

Dick Taverne was a very personable colleague who was always happy to debate key issues and to be involved in voluntary sector organisations in support of important public issues. In his electoral and parliamentary roles as a committed European he was very much a precursor and an example to many colleagues who followed him and who were encouraged by his example. ■

Michael Meadowcroft

As in 2016, the vast majority of readers found the *Journal* neither too academic nor not academic enough (87 per cent; 10 per cent too academic, 2 per cent not academic enough) and felt we were striking the right balance between general introductory articles about Liberal history and detailed treatments of specific topics (76 per cent right balance; 13 per cent each for more general articles and more detailed articles). Thank you for all the main suggestions for topics for new articles; two broad themes were requests for more on recent Liberal history, and more about Liberal parties outside the UK (this was also a request in 2016). We will do our best to fulfil them, though as ever this depends on whether we can identify suitable authors, or whether authors come forward with contributions.

The background of respondents has changed a little since 2016, with a slightly higher proportion of Liberal Democrat members (90 per cent compared to 79 per cent). There is also an

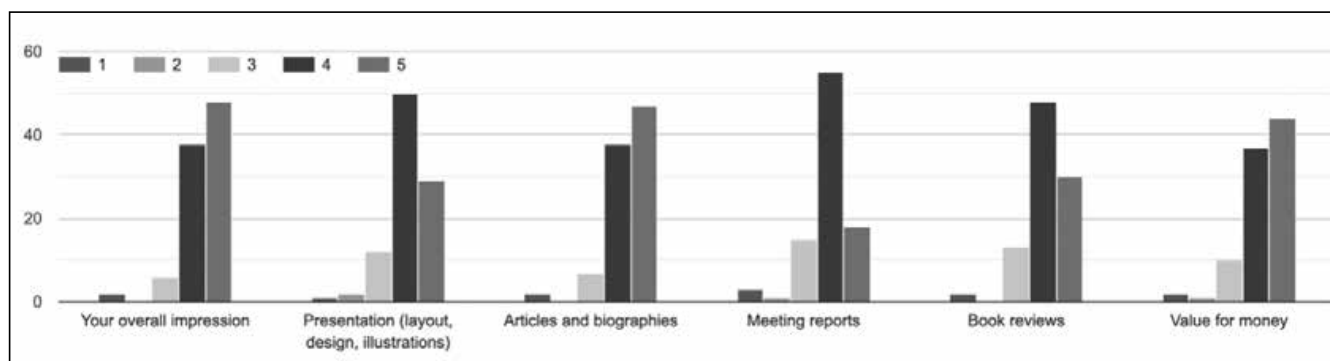
Survey responses

Thanks very much to the 101 individuals who completed our survey over the last two months of 2025. We last surveyed readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* in 2016, so this was well overdue!

We asked respondents to rate various aspects of the *Journal* on

a scale from 1 (worst) to 5 (best) – see chart below. The averages across all respondents were (2016 ratings in brackets): overall impression 4.38 (4.19); presentation 4.11 (3.56); articles and biographies 4.36 (4.25); meeting reports 3.91 (3.70); book reviews 4.12 (4.03); and value for money 4.28 (4.25).

Ratings of aspects of the *Journal of Liberal History* from 1 (worst) to 5 (best); Y axis is numbers of respondents



older age profile, though this is almost entirely due to a much larger number of people aged 75 or over amongst the respondents (23 per cent compared to 4 per cent); possibly older people in 2025 are more familiar with online surveys than in 2016. Respondents' educational background is similar, with 50 per cent (2016: 59 per cent) having completed a postgraduate degree.

Respondents were more likely to have gone to or watched History Group meetings than in 2016, with 56 per cent having attended one or more (2016: 39 per cent) – presumably because they are now accessible online, either during the meeting or afterwards. Thanks also for the suggestions for future topics and speakers. Respondents were also slightly more likely to have visited the History Group's website than in 2016: 79 per cent visited frequently or occasionally, compared to 70 per cent in 2016.

Engagement with the History Group's social media outlets was limited, as in 2016, with quite a few respondents expressing principled objections to Facebook and Twitter; we are also now posting on Bluesky and are planning to do so on LinkedIn.

Finally, we asked whether respondents would be interested in purchasing second, revised, editions of two of our books.

There was more interest in a new version of our general book on British Liberal history, *Peace, Reform and Liberation* (55 per cent would buy one) than in a new *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* – and in fact we have decided that it would be better to expand and update the biography content on our website rather than aim to publish a new book of biographies. We do, however, intend to go ahead with a new edition of *Peace, Reform and Liberation* – watch this space! ■

Duncan Brack

homosexuality had been legalised for over 215 – he told his local party. He said 'I'd better not stand in Crossgate', assuming that the revelation would hurt the party's chances. But he told how a retired schoolteacher – 'a little old woman', as he put it – said 'Well, I think Sam should stand because he lives in the ward and people know him'. So he did.

And Sam won through the traditional community politics that was the hallmark of Liberal candidates – and still sets Liberal Democrat candidates apart today. He went door to door, delivering thousands of leaflets. Canvassing tirelessly. He asked people what they thought about the local area and the local council. He listened to their concerns, and he acted on them.

But Sam did make history. In 1972, he became the first openly gay man to be elected as a councillor anywhere in the United Kingdom. Possibly even the first anywhere in the world.

And on Sunday, I was delighted to visit Sam's former home and join City of Durham Parish Councillors and local residents to unveil a blue plaque commemorating Sam Green as the trailblazer he was.

It is a testament to his courage. Because it took a huge amount of courage to come out to his whole community, to face the hostility and homophobia so prevalent

Commemorating Sam Green

On 9 November 2025, Ed Davey unveiled a plaque to Sam Green, Liberal councillor on Durham City Council, 1972–79, and the first openly gay councillor elected in the UK. Below we reprint his article for the party website:

Sam Green didn't set out to make history. In 1972, he stood as the Liberal candidate for Crossgate ward in the

City of Durham for the same reason our candidates stand for their local communities across the country: because they want to get things done. As Sam put it, he wanted to 'get things moving in the city'.

When he decided to put his membership of the Gay Liberation Front on his election manifesto – just five years after

in those days, and to campaign openly as who he was.

And it's also testament to the people of Durham, who – more than 50 years ago – were open-minded and accepting enough to see Sam for who he was: a dedicated local campaigner who would be a hardworking and principled councillor.

Thinking about what Sam faced then – and the fact that before 1972 no one anywhere had won election as an openly gay candidate – made me reflect on how far we've come as a society.

There are now 75 out LGBT+ MPs in the House of Commons. Just this week, our party elected one of them – Josh Babarinde – as our President. And perhaps the most remarkable thing was that no one found it remarkable that he's gay.

But there is still far more work to do.

Because, more than half a century after Sam was elected, LGBT people still sadly face far too much hostility and discrimination, just for being who they are. Too many people still don't feel they can be open about their identity. Too many candidates feel the need to hide it – despite the trail blazed first by Sam and followed by so many others.

So I hope that remembering the courage and dedication of Councillor Sam Green will also serve to spur us on to continue to champion equality, respect and the



rights of all people – to be who they are, to serve their communities with pride, and to get things moving. ■

Rt Hon Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Liberal candidates directory

The latest edition of the Liberal candidates directory is now available on the Journal of Liberal History website, at <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/resource-type/election-candidates-directory/>. This is a comprehensive biographical index of the individuals who have contested a UK parliamentary election under the designation Liberal, Liberal Democrat and Social Democrat (plus candidates from the Alliance Party in Northern Ireland) from 1945 to 2024.

Much new information has been added, including candidates who stood in the 2024 general election and all by-elections since the 2019 election. Separate sections cover 11 English regions (Devon and Cornwall, East Midlands, East of England, Greater London,

North East, North West, South Central, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside) and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Huge thanks, as always, to Lionel King who has devoted so much time over the years to compiling the directory. Lionel is a long-standing member of the History Group and was himself a parliamentary candidate (Kidderminster 1964, Sutton Coldfield 1970, Walsall South 1987).

Corrections and new information is always welcome. If you have any comments, please send them to Lionel on lionelking1964@btinternet.com and they will be included in future editions. ■

Chris Millington