the faculty was clear to see. The a cappella rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne', by the university's St Salvator's Chapel Choir, would have brought tears to his eyes.

I last saw Ming a month or so before he died, in a care home in London. He was frail, sometimes struggling for the right words; the stutter that he had overcome for so many years, but I had always noted as a part of his eloquent style, was more pronounced. But he knew what he wanted to say and wouldn't put up with a less than perfectly crafted sentence. He was lost a bit in reminiscence, monologuing through experiences he wanted to share then linking them to another event as if ploughing a furrow through his life. The Ming Campbell I knew and loved faded slowly after Elspeth's death, as if he could no longer see his North Star. Like the passing of Valiant-for-Truth in Pilgrim's Progress, the trumpets had sounded for her, and soon for him, on the other side.

The words at his memorial that struck me most were from St Paul in his Epistle to Timothy: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' Who now keeps the faith he represented? Who now will keep that candle burning? ■

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Corrigenda

In *Journal of Liberal History* 129 (winter 2025–26), the surname of the author of the article on 'Edward Donner and the rise of Manchester Liberalism', Derek Earis, was unfortunately mis-spelt as 'Earls'. This has been corrected in the online version of the *Journal* but was spotted too late for the print versions. Our sincere apologies to Mr Earis and all our readers. ■

Letters to the Editor

Party constitutions

The mentions of the 1936 Liberal Party constitution in Andrew Loader's piece 'The rebuilding and reorganisation of the party' (*Journal of Liberal History* 127, summer 2025) understandably focus on how it differed from what went before.

However, having recently picked up a second-hand copy of the document, I find there are also historical insights to draw from what went on to change in subsequent Liberal, and then Liberal Democrat, constitutions.

Perhaps most striking from a modern perspective is the trio of areas that would become big issues for the party and its procedures but are mostly missing from the 1936 constitution: the party leader, local government and policy.

The way the constitution pretty much ignores the existence of the party leader – and there's certainly none of the sort of detail that resulted in my briefly becoming the party's co-leader in 2020 – reflects the historic concern that Parliament should be free of outside interference. Hence it was for Parliamentarians to decide who their leader was, and so by default who the leader of their party was.

That sense of independence, while welcome when seeing off interfering monarchs, became increasingly problematic during the twentieth century as the growth of party organisations outside Parliament meant there was a democratic, rather than monarchical, impetus to give those outside Parliament a say too. Hence the different formulas that parties have devised to mix influence for their MPs with a voice for their members in choosing their leader, with a key milestone being the 1976 Liberal Party leadership election, which used an electoral college of sorts to give party members the decision-making power.

The general neglect of local government in the 1936 document also reflects broader political trends in Britain. It has consistently been treated as the poor cousin to Parliamentary government, and it was not until Paddy Ashdown that a leader of the Liberals or Liberal Democrats really saw progress in local government elections as a key part of reviving the party on a national stage.

The wider party had been ahead of its leaders. The community politics movement of the 1970s in particular saw local government both as important in its own right and also as a means to build up the party nationally. But before then, as the 1936 constitution shows, debates, commissions and decisions about how to revive the party nationally mostly left local government out.

On policy, there is a policy-making role given in the constitution, but it is limited and without the sort of policy-making apparatus – and committee – that would now be unthinkable to be without.

However, on the flip side, there are two things present in the constitution which are missing from more recent ones, where history may perhaps be telling us that we should think again.

First, the 1936 version gives particular attention, respect and even some powers to the party's trained, formally qualified election agents. Second, it gives explicit priority to having selected (prospective) Parliamentary candidates in place in as many seats as possible for as long as possible. Indeed, part of the chief objective for every constituency association in the constitution is 'to have always in the field a parliamentary candidate who will be the focus of their activities' (Article 27k).

The 1936 constitution followed a Liberal Party election disaster. Since our own grim 2019 result, we have made progress on both those scores – such as the additional awards at party conference for party campaigners and in the reforms to our Parliamentary candidate process agreed following the 2024 general election.

However there is, I am sure, more to do. Indeed, the debates over the candidate changes showed how there is a strand of belief in the party that for most seats Parliamentary candidates are a necessity only needed to be in place late in the day, rather than being a valuable year-round presence to help the party build up even in weaker areas. The 1936 vision of local party organisation being centred on a Parliamentary candidate and an agent was a very different approach.

Therefore, as well as welcoming many of the differences between the 2026 and 1936 constitutions, especially the greater democratic voice for members in the former, those currently active in the Liberal Democrats should perhaps also reflect on some of the lessons which could be adapted for the 21st century that the 1936 version still provides.

Mark Pack

Liberal PMs

I found Alan Mumford's article on Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman (*Journal of Liberal History* 129, winter 2025–26) fascinating. I am more familiar with Asquith and Lloyd George, his next two subjects [included in this issue], but his assessment of C-B will lead me to learn more about his contribution as PM.

There is of course less to learn about Rosebery, both because of his diffidence and his brief time in office. Even so I found the assessment of Rosebery's communication skills, essentially restricted to his limited oratory, less than convincing. He may not have had C-B's smooth and silky handling of his colleagues but he must have convinced the Queen and party grandees that he was preferable to Harcourt.

What surprised me, though, was the absence of any reference to Dick Leonard's two books on 19th and 20th century Prime Ministers. He assesses the performances of each from Pitt to Blair, and writes some pithy commentary. Although Leonard was, briefly, a Labour MP he was a pro-European social democrat who would have found the Liberal Party congenial.

Hugh Gault