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# Landowner and Minister

Angus Hawkins and John Powell (eds):

*The Journal of John Wodehouse, First Earl  
Kimberley, for 1862–1902*

(Camden Fifth Series, Press Syndicate of the  
University of Cambridge, 1997)

Reviewed by Tony Little

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John Wodehouse was born in 1826 and died in 1902. He kept a journal from 1862 onwards, but in the first few pages gave a summary of his life to date and his service in the diplomatic corps in Russia. He was a member of each of Gladstone's cabinets and served Rosebery. He died, effectively still in service under Campbell-Bannerman, as leader of the much-diminished opposition group of Liberal peers.

Kimberley was an ambitious politician who in the early part of the *Journal* spends much time fretting that his talents have not been noticed by the Palmerstonian leadership. Yet he went on to hold office as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland – a success in a post in which few won laurels – during the outbreak of the Fenian revolt. He was Lord Privy Seal and Colonial Secretary in the first Gladstone Government. He was again Colonial Secretary for part of the second Gladstone administration, and went on to the India Office. In 1892, he became Lord President of the Council (responsible for education) and when Rosebery became premier Kimberley took his place as Foreign Secretary.

This is a general journal, useful not only for the detail it brings out on the various controversies of the period, but for reminding us that even the most dedicated politicians led other lives. As a landowner, Kimberley regularly noted the state of the harvest and the weather and enjoyed his fishing and shooting. He took an interest in local affairs, whether as a magistrate looking at penal policy or as paternalist concerned with the practical arrangements for the poor.

As a family man he was evidently closely attached to his wife<sup>1</sup> and children, but had concerns about a son whose gambling proved expensive. A householder's worries do not stop with the harvest, and in the course of the book Kimberley suffered both fires and a burglary to his homes. A firm Protestant, he harboured a strong prejudice against Catholicism but could not prevent it reaching into the family as well as the political circle. Towards the end of his life he was even to try a 'motor car', described in 1899 as 'that horrible vehicle' (p. 468) – perhaps Kimberley was an early environmentalist.

Nevertheless, it is the general politics which make the *Journal* worthwhile. Kimberley refers to items of departmental concern but did not use the *Journal* as a daily record of his actions as a minister. Rather it is the overall political stage and the actors upon it that most attract his pen. Kimberley had prepared a *Journal of Events* in the 1870s, based on the first Gladstone ministry, which has subsequently been published.<sup>2</sup> He also prepared a memoir which has not survived but is known through notes taken by Rosebery and held in his archives (and reprinted at the end of

the *Journal*). Consequently, the *Journal* is not completely unblemished. At the start of his cabinet career, he tried to be careful not to record the details of secret cabinet discussions, and as the *Journal of Events* and the memoir were prepared he went back over the diaries, amending and, more unfortunately, excising, comments. Despite this activity, what is left is worthwhile and for the period of the second Gladstone ministry onwards, Kimberley was more relaxed about the material he included and more forthright in the judgements he passed.

As a Liberal rather than a Whig, it is clear that he was not a part of that close-knit circle of the Cousinhood, and despite his loyalty to the Gladstonian wing of the party he did not follow his leader uncritically. Kimberley is generally viewed as a kindly but talkative old buffer, but the *Journal* gives a somewhat tougher view of his judgements. He was particularly harsh about Harcourt – 'utterly without principle, an arrant coward and a blustering bully' (p. 438) – emphasising the degree of difficulty faced by Rosebery in trying to run his ill-fated regime. Even Lady Waldegrave, the great Whig hostess, fell heavily foul of his pen: 'She was once rather good-looking, but always coarse and had a fat ill-shaped figure ... She fancied she understood politics and that she exercised a great influence on statesmen, who behind her back only laughed at her ... As to her entertainments the food and wine were always bad ...' (pp. 311–12)

In fact, Kimberley rarely found the food at public banquets or great events to his liking, though he did consider the wine at Buckingham Palace up to scratch. Not all his verdicts are so harsh; he was generally kind to Granville and, among the opposition, to Salisbury, though never to Derby (the Prime Minister). Offsetting these judgements, he was usually tough on himself, rarely saying anything complimentary about his own speeches and recognising that his public following was limited.

The *Journal* reinforces current positive views on the effectiveness of

the Hartington/Granville leadership in the period 1875–80 and of the difficulties Gladstone found in leading the party after 1880, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs. Kimberley is especially interesting on the response of Britain to the rise of Germany, where he was inclined to take a much more vigorous line than the rest of the government in confronting the Germans over their colonial ambitions.

The House of Lords was where Kimberley operated – a topic which, I believe, is a much-neglected part of Victorian studies. The *Journal* throws several interesting sidelights on the Lords. In 1869, there were probably over 160 Liberal peers (p. 236) but after the gradual loss of support among the aristocracy over Irish land reform and the split over Home Rule, the Liberal strength in the Lords dwindled to around forty, only half of whom were present at the meeting at Spencer House in 1897 to elect Kimberley as their leader (p. 445). No wonder Lord Rosebery felt he lacked support as prime minister.

This is a well-produced work with a substantial array of 1447 footnotes to assist in explanation or further detail (plus a further forty-five for the memoir), including cross-referencing to the Gladstone Diaries where relevant. Some further help could have been given on foreign affairs in the early part of the book but, as the editors get into the rhythm of the work, they become sure-footed guides in the main period of domestic interest. Kimberley has not had a full biography but, taken together with the extracts from his correspondence, also edited by John Powell,<sup>3</sup> we are beginning to see a fuller picture of the contribution he made to the Liberal front bench. The *Journal* is well worth the study but does require some prior knowledge of the main events of the period.

*Notes:*

- 1 She may have been less happy – see John Powell (ed): *Liberal by Principle* (The Historians Press, 1996).
- 2 Ethel Drus (ed): *A Journal of Events during the Gladstone Ministry 1868–74* (1958).
- 3 Powell, *Liberal by Principle*.

recognition from his participation in the then popular radio show, *The Brains' Trust*. The broadcast was not a great success; Samuel not only overran his allotted fifteen minutes but was cut off before he reached the end of his talk, due to a misunderstanding with the producer over the pre-arranged signal for ending the broadcast. Given this, it is perhaps a matter of some relief that the broadcast does not feature on the tape!

However, the omission of Lord Samuel does highlight the major weakness of this otherwise enjoyable and useful collection. Although extracts from forty-two broadcasts are included, and the tape runs to almost three hours, many of the most famous or significant broadcasts are missing. The collection is also heavily weighted towards the 1990s, with twenty-three of the forty-two broadcasts included dating from 1991 or later.

Nonetheless, there are enough for the interested viewers to see for themselves some of the changes in the construction and use of broadcasts since 1951. Many of the early ones – including the first on the tape from Labour in 1951 – show a relatively naïve approach to the TV medium, with interviews where the interviewee, rather than looking at the interviewer, immediately turns to the camera on speaking. Nonetheless, from very early on many of the broadcasts were slickly – for their day – packaged.

One of the four political broadcasts from the 1950s included on the tape is Labour's from September 1959, which was a very polished piece masterminded by Anthony Wedgwood Benn (as he then called himself). As he himself later said, 'I was the Peter Mandelson – Bryan Gould of the 1959 election. I fought a brilliant campaign and lost.' Based on the format of the then popular BBC programme *Tonight* the broadcast had the appearance of a current affairs programme. It provoked the Conservatives to broadcast a reply, filmed in the same studio and revealing some of the tricks used by Labour.<sup>2</sup> This was the first election

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## Politics on TV

### *Party Political Broadcasts: The Greatest Hits*

(Politico's Publishing; VHS, 169 minutes)

*Reviewed by Mark Pack*

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The eagle-eyed pedant may be a little confused by the start of this videotape. It announces that in 1953 Harold Macmillan starred in the first official party political broadcast, and then goes straight into a Labour broadcast from 1951. In fact, 1951 saw the first political broadcasts during a general election (often called party election broadcasts, or PEBs) whilst 1953 saw the first broadcasts outside election time (often called party political broadcasts, or PPBs).<sup>1</sup>

The BBC had been pressing for political broadcasts to be used during the 1950 election, but initially met hostility from politicians. The very first political broadcast, either PEB or PPB, was eventually seen on

15 October 1951, and featured the former Liberal Home Secretary Lord Samuel. An eighty-one year old peer, he made a rather odd choice for this leading role, although he had a certain degree of

in which the audience for TV PEBs was larger than that for PEBs on radio.

The other 1950s broadcasts included are Labour's first from October 1951, Hugh Gaitskell's call for the Prime Minister to resign over Suez (November 1956) and the first broadcast outside election time, by the Conservatives in May 1953. This had an opening line unlikely to be considered an audience-grabber nowadays: 'Good evening. I'm Bill Deedes, the Conservative Member of Parliament for Ashford.'

The 1960s are not represented on the tape, which means that, *inter alia*, viewers are deprived of Harold Wilson's debut with the autocue in 1963, which soon became standard equipment. Also missing is the dramatic opening to the 1966 Liberal broadcast, which featured silhouettes of Ludovic Kennedy and Harold Wilson. The 1970 election saw major innovations in the format of broadcasts by the Conservatives, as they started using carefully shot and edited footage to produce lively, 'newsreel' style films.

These innovative broadcasts are not featured on the tape, although it does include the rather bizarre University Challenge-style Labour broadcast from March 1970. This had teams answering questions on topics such as whether or not pensioners were better off after six years of Labour. Also present is the Jimmy Saville – Jeremy Thorpe double act from April 1972. Apart from its unfortunate reminder of 1970s clothes styles, it also illustrates how hostile questioning used to be welcomed, rather than viewed as something to be carefully spun out of existence. Included amongst those allowed to question Thorpe was a member of the Monday Club's Executive, who attacked the Young Liberals for their support of direct action.

The rest of the 1970s is well represented, with Conservative, Labour and Liberal broadcasts from February 1974 and two Conservative broadcasts from April 1979. Sadly missing, though, is the famous May 1978 Saatchi's broadcast – which was

also their first public advertising for the party – that showed Britain 'going backwards' under Labour and had been preceded by a taster newspaper advertising campaign.

Only one broadcast from the first half of the 1980s is included, the Alliance's of May 1983; however, the broadcasts of the time showed little innovation or creative spark. Of the late 1980s we have both a humorous Tory broadcast of April 1986, along with one of the famous John Cleese PPBs. Rather than his broadcast explaining PR, the tape includes his April 1987 effort, which was a highly articulate plea for moderation in politics. Although it had plenty of jokes and smart visual gimmicks, at heart it is a carefully argued piece of political philosophy, and serves as a reminder that complicated arguments can still be put over, even in modern politics.

The 1987 election is represented by one broadcast from each of the main parties, including Rosie Barnes and rabbit from the Alliance, and Labour's 'Kinnock – the movie.'<sup>3</sup> The Conservative broadcast contains an extended sequence – over two and a half minutes – of pictures and backing music, with no talking or voice-over. At the time, this was the longest such sequence, with music provided by Andrew Lloyd-Webber, and pictures of Mrs Thatcher as international political leader. Two of the shots stand out particularly Thatcher and Helmut Kohl getting into 'his and hers' tanks, and another of Mrs Thatcher standing rather meekly by as Richard Branson waves enthusiastically to the crowds. The other two 1980s broadcasts included are Glenda Jackson in the conservatory with her plants (August 1987) and the Green Party's broadcast for the European elections (June 1989).

From the 1990s, there is John Major's broadcast on the Gulf War (January 1991), along with four from the general election of 1992, including the famous 'Jennifer's ear' broadcast on the health service. Six broadcasts are included for the period between the 1992 and 1997 elections,

including one from the SNP, and the Natural Law Party's broadcast for the European elections of June 1994. The 1997 election is generously covered with eleven broadcasts, including SNP, Liberal and UK Independence Party, though not even for 1997 is any broadcast from Plaid Cymru included. Most striking about these broadcasts is that up to and including 1992, Labour's broadcasts regularly feature the problems of poverty amongst pensioners, but those on the tape since then are notable for their relative neglect of this issue. The final broadcast is William Hague's apology for the Conservatives from October 1997.

The tape is rather a lucky-dip collection of political broadcasts, with many of the most famous, important or interesting ones missing. However, credit should be given for the effort of putting together such a tape – and one which, moreover, both provides good value for money and has plenty to please both the casual viewer and the interested amateur or professional student of politics.

#### Notes:

- 1 Political broadcasts on radio predated those on TV by several decades, having started in the 1920s.
- 2 Although this broadcast still exists, at least in parts, this early example of TV rebuttal is regrettably not included on the tape.
- 3 Curiously, the version included is not the more famous one, which in place of the nearly-obligatory screen saying 'Vote Labour' ended with a plea to vote for Kinnock. This is probably the only party political to have so ended with a plea to vote for a leader rather than their party.

## PPBs: The Greatest Hits

is available from Politico's (8 Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RZ) for the special discounted price of £15.99 (normal price £19.99) for subscribers to the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*.

To order, use the leaflet included with this issue.

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# The 'New Liberalism'

George L. Bernstein: *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* (Allen & Unwin, 1986)

Reviewed by Matthew Roberts

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The Edwardian Liberal Party, troubled throughout its entire existence, seems to have found even less peace in death. For the Edwardian Liberal Party can be likened to a corpse that has been subjected to an eternal autopsy with a seemingly infinite number of historians gathered around it, prodding and poking it in different places whilst failing to agree on the cause and time of death.

At the same time, some historians have argued that the Liberal Party was showing no sign of decay before the First World War. This is the thesis advanced by Dr Clarke in his book *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*. He has argued that class-based politics had arrived by 1910 and that Liberalism had adapted to this trend in the form of a 'new liberalism', an ideology based on radical and collectivist social reform. More importantly, he maintains that this successfully bolstered working-class support for the Liberals, and it was this that was responsible for their success, rather than a temporary revival of nonconformity and free trade. Furthermore, Clarke tells us that most Liberals accepted this reorientation. Above all, this new liberalism provided the basis for a progressive alliance with the newly established Labour Party. This alliance, so the argument went, successfully contained the Labour Party and maintained the Liberals as the dominant party of the left.<sup>1</sup>

With the exception of a few articles, it would be fifteen years before a comprehensive response to Clarke's work appeared. George Bernstein's *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* proved to be that very response. He takes a much more cynical view of the new

liberalism and the progressive alliance, arguing that neither offered an effective solution to the party's problem of attracting working-class votes.

In contradistinction to Clarke, Bernstein rejects the notion that class-based politics had arrived. Indeed, for him, the Liberal Party could not cultivate support on class lines. Since the backbone of its support came from the middle classes, any appeal to the working classes would be tantamount to admitting that they had a distinct interest which needed to be promoted in opposition to the middle classes. Furthermore, this was anathema to the ideology of Liberalism, based as it was on appealing to both the middle and working classes by uniting them against the landed classes. More importantly, he maintains that the Liberals' success before the war was precisely because class-based politics had not fully arrived, and it was the attack on privilege and wealth that attracted the working classes. If the point came where labour began to see capitalism as the enemy, liberalism would have little appeal to the workers.

One of the most interesting tenets of Bernstein's thesis is the argument that the new liberalism did not become a priority for the rank and file. Throughout the book the reader is constantly reminded that traditional

liberal issues such as land, education and temperance continued to predominate. Nevertheless, Bernstein implicitly accepts that a 'new liberalism' existed. For him, it was simply the case that the majority of the rank and file were tepid towards it. Arguably, it would be more appropriate to say that for many Liberals, this was the reality of the new liberalism, i.e. an underlying commitment to traditional liberal issues and remedies, masked by progressive overtones.

Similarly with the progressive alliance: with what Bernstein tells the reader, one feels that he is on the right lines but does not go far enough. He is quick to tell us that the Liberals could never form a successful alliance with Labour since they differed on fundamental issues. The Liberals saw Labour as challenging their most sacred principles – a free market, private property and even individual liberty itself. At the same time, many in the Labour camp were increasingly hostile to the seeming indifference of many Liberals to the plight of the workers. The Liberals could never accept the level of interference in the economy that Labour advocated. What Bernstein misses is that there had never been a progressive alliance. What had existed in some constituencies was a short-term expedient arrangement that benefited the two parties, keeping the Conservatives out – a frequent issue when there was a split on the left. Or as Martin Pugh pertinently states, many of the Liberal rank and file: 'perceived that Labour stood for the same policies as the Liberal government, which is a more realistic and a more modest claim than the view that they subscribed to a common progressive ideology.'<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most rewarding part of *Liberalism and Liberal Politics* is the final chapter on 'Liberalism and External Affairs'. This is not a subject that usually finds its way into a book concerned with the decline of the Liberal Party. What Bernstein has to say abundantly demonstrates that any account of Liberal eclipse should take note of the party's approach to foreign and imperial af-

fares. The chapter is littered with examples of occasions where high-minded Liberal principles conflicted with the everyday reality of world affairs. In many ways, Grey was the epitome of this contradiction. The fundamental objective of liberalism in foreign affairs was the negation of a balance of power, for this implied that nations were inherently hostile to one another and it limited freedom of manoeuvrability. Yet the threat of Germany forced Grey to make overtures to France and Russia, thereby accepting the notion of a balance of power. The outbreak of war in 1914 seemed to be yet another nail in the coffin for liberalism.

There is little ambiguity in the impression that Bernstein wants his readers to go away with. The final sentence could not be clearer: 'If class-based politics were coming, so was the decline of the Liberal Party – not imminently, perhaps, but eventually and inevitably.' The question was, how much longer would traditional liberal issues continue to appeal to the electorate? There were already signs by 1914 that the working classes no longer placed their faith in that Gladstonian relic known as the Liberal Party.

## A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

### 1974 Remembered

The two elections of 1974 formed the peak of the second post-war Liberal revival, giving the party six million votes but no more than fourteen MPs. A wide range of participants in the campaigns – including Tim Beaumont, Viv Bingham, Adrian Slade, Sir Cyril Smith, Paul Tyler MP and Richard Wainwright – share their recollections of the elections of twenty-five years ago.

**8.00pm, Sunday 19 September**

Committee Room, Majestic Hotel, Harrogate

#### Notes:

- 1 P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
- 2 M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History* 1978, D1146.

## Mill on Limited Liability Partnerships

*continued from page 16*

The only regulations on the subject of limited partnerships which

seem to me desirable, are such as may secure the public from falling into error, by being led to believe that partners who have only a limited responsibility, are liable to the whole extent of their property. For this purpose, it would probably be expedient, that, the names of the limited partners, with the amount for which each was responsible, should be recorded in a register, accessible to all persons; and it might also be recorded, whether the whole, or if not, what portion of the amount, had been paid up.

If these particulars were made generally accessible, concerns in which there were limited partners would present in some respects a greater security to the public than private firms now afford; since there are at present no means of ascertaining what portion of the funds with which a firm carries on business may consist of borrowed capital.

No one, I think, can consistently condemn these partnerships without being prepared to maintain that it is desirable that no one should carry on business with borrowed capital; in other words, that the profit of business should be wholly monopolised by those who had had time to accumulate, or the good fortune to inherit capital; a proposition, in the present state of commerce and industry, evidently absurd.

(signed) J. S. Mill

## History Group Publications

Following the success of the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, the History Group will be publishing more books in association with Politico's – and readers of the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* are invited to help.

The *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* is scheduled for September 1999, part of a set of three political quotations books.

*Great Liberal Speeches*, intended for publication during 2000. This book will include the full texts of around thirty famous speeches by Liberal politicians, with commentaries.

*An Oral History of Twentieth-Century Liberalism*. A thematic study of the Liberal Party and liberalism, drawing upon interviews with Liberal activists and politicians, as well as autobiographical sources.

*Dictionary of Liberal Biography, 2nd edition*, provisionally scheduled for 2002 or 2003 – but we would like to hear ideas now for the inclusion of major figures omitted from the first edition.

Please write with ideas, on these and on any other potential books, to Duncan Brack, Flat 9, 6 Hopton Road, London SW16 2EQ; ldhg@dbrack.dircon.co.uk.