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HISTORY



Liberals and the Boer War

Iain Sharpe

The Liberal Party and the South African War 1899–1902

Dr Jacqueline Beaumont

The Liberal Press and the South African War

J. Graham Jones

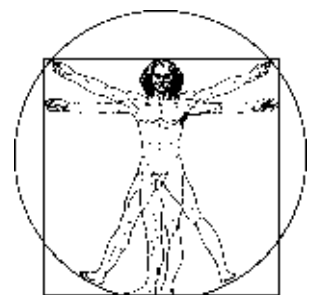
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Old Liberal Party: 'Oh deary me! Which platform shall I take?'

A cartoon representation in *Punch* of the dilemma facing the Liberal Party during the Boer War (*Punch*, 1 August 1900).

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The Liberal Party and the South African War 1899–1902

The South African War of 1899–1902, commonly known as the Boer War, brought to a head long-standing divisions in the Liberal Party over its attitude to empire and foreign policy and very nearly led to a permanent split along the lines of the 1886 Liberal Unionist secession. The 1900 general election saw the party reach the nadir of the its pre-1914 electoral fortunes, when it suffered an unprecedented second successive landslide defeat. Internal feuding between supporters and opponents of the war threatened to lead a permanent division in the Liberal ranks, along the lines of the Liberal Unionist secession of 1886. Yet, within four years of the war's end the Liberals were back in power, having themselves won a landslide majority. Paradoxically, although the war led to the Liberal defeat in 1900, its legacy contributed to the 1906 victory.

Empire and the Liberal Party

The divisions in the Liberal Party that the war accentuated had their origins in differing views on how the party should cope with the growing enthusiasm for empire among the electorate during the 1880s and 1890s. On these issues the party divided into three camps. Many Liberals believed the party should follow in the footsteps of Cobden, Bright and Gladstone in supporting 'peace, retrenchment and reform'. They opposed overseas expansion and entanglements as wrong in themselves and as drains on the exchequer. Many backbench Liberal MPs felt that it was a fundamental purpose of the party to maintain what they saw as the 'Liberal tradition' of a pacific foreign and imperial policy. Some leading figures in the party such as Sir William Harcourt

(leader in the House of Commons from 1894 to 1898) and John Morley, Gladstone's biographer, were inclined to sympathise with these views.¹ However, some Liberals (dubbed 'Liberal Imperialists') believed that a policy of opposition to imperial expansion was an electoral albatross for the Liberal Party. Lord Rosebery, Gladstone's successor as Prime Minister, and rising stars such as Sir Edward Grey, R. B. Haldane and H. H. Asquith felt that the party was in danger of being portrayed as unpatriotic – willing to countenance the dismantling of empire and thus the decline of British power. Rosebery wanted the party to shake off the Gladstonian legacy and positively embrace empire. Although he resigned from the Liberal leadership in 1896, a year after his government was defeated in a general election, he remained a 'king over the water' for many Liberals who sympathised with his views.²

The third strand of opinion was represented by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal leader from 1899. Campbell-Bannerman belonged to the centre of the party, describing himself as 'a Liberal and an imperialist enough for any decent man'.³ He and many mainstream Liberals broadly supported the Cobden/Gladstone tradition, but saw the need for the party to be pragmatic. They recognised that hostility to empire was not electorally popular, but equally they rejected the views of the Liberal Imperialists who seemed prepared to abandon Liberal principles altogether in the cause of electoral expediency. Campbell-Bannerman's views were shared by a substantial section of the party but, as is often the case when parties suffer debilitating splits, those at either extreme were unwilling to unite around a compromise policy for the sake of party unity. Given

the nature of these divisions, an imperial war was guaranteed to highlight and widen the faultlines within the Liberal Party.

Britain and South Africa 1877–1899

The war in South Africa was the culmination of a quarter of a century's efforts by British governments to establish supremacy in the region, which was seen as a vital British strategic interest as a key point on the route to India. South Africa consisted of the two British colonies of the Cape and Natal and two independent Dutch republics, Transvaal and Orange Free State. In 1877 Disraeli's government annexed the Transvaal, but after an uprising by Transvaalers and the defeat of a British army at the battle of Majuba Hill in 1881, the new Liberal government effectively restored its independence under British suzerainty. The discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 made matters more pressing as it meant that the Transvaal could be in an economically dominant position within South Africa.⁴ Over the following decade Britain tried to force the Transvaal into accepting a British-dominated South African federation.

At the end of 1895 the Cape Prime Minister, Cecil Rhodes, engineered the 'Jameson Raid', an invasion of the Transvaal in support of a planned rising by the Uitlanders – British citizens living in the Transvaal who dominated the gold mining industry there. The rising did not take place and the raid ended in fiasco with the invading force being captured by Transvaal commandos. The embarrassment of the raid's failure was compounded by a widespread suspicion that the Unionist Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, was complicit in its planning.⁵ However, when a House of Commons committee of inquiry into the raid made no criticism of the government the Liberal leader, Sir William Harcourt, who served on the committee, was widely felt to have let Chamberlain off the hook. Yet, since the inquiry took place at a time when delicate negotiations were taking place with the Transvaal and in the middle of Queen Victoria's

Diamond Jubilee year, Harcourt's room for manoeuvre was constrained by the need to avoid appearing unpatriotic. The Jameson Raid episode highlighted the dilemma the Liberals faced in opposing the government on matters that appeared to involve Britain's vital national interests – a dilemma which was to recur during the war.⁶

To recover Britain's position after the raid, the government appointed Sir Alfred Milner as High Commissioner to the Cape Colony in 1897. Milner, a committed imperialist who described himself as a 'British race patriot',⁷ was a highly-regarded administrator and had close links with the Liberal Imperialists, sharing a Balliol background with Asquith and Grey. He was determined to bring matters to a head and assert British supremacy in South Africa. After abortive negotiations during the summer of 1899, Britain despatched troops to South Africa in September and in response the Transvaal and the Orange Free State launched a pre-emptive invasion of Natal.

The outbreak of war

From the start Campbell-Bannerman as Liberal leader tried to resolve the problem of how to lead an opposition party during wartime, without appearing unpatriotic. His position was made more difficult by the fact that British territory had been invaded and, in the early part of the war, was under enemy occupation, so opposition to the war was not a realistic political option.⁸ Campbell-Bannerman pursued a middle course, agreeing to vote supplies for the war, but criticising the government's aggressive diplomacy in dealing with the Transvaal. But while many Liberal MPs could support this position, there were many on either wing of the party who would not rally round it.

Splits in the party became apparent almost immediately after the outbreak of war. An amendment to the Queen's Speech in October criticising the government's diplomacy, moved by Liberal MP Philip Stanhope, won the support of fifty-five Liberal MPs even though the leadership abstained.⁹ Liberals who

opposed the war saw it as the party's duty to follow in the tradition of Gladstone's 1879–80 Midlothian campaign and defend the rights of small nations. However, Liberal MPs who were involved in anti-war agitation were mostly obscure and eccentric backbenchers, while their sympathisers at the higher levels of the party remained circumspect.¹⁰ Thus anti-war Liberals were unable to impose their policy on the party leadership. Many Liberal opponents of the war became involved in non-party organisations such as the South Africa Conciliation Committee and the more extreme Stop-the-War Committee. In February 1900 some of them set up the League of Liberals Against Militarism and Aggression as a pressure group for anti-war Liberals.

Opponents of the war were dubbed 'pro-Boers' by their opponents, and often adopted the label themselves as a badge of defiance.¹¹ In response to the creation of the League of Liberals Against Militarism and Aggression, Liberal Imperialists founded the Imperial Liberal Council in the spring of 1900, although the most famous Liberal Imperialists such as Rosebery, Asquith, Haldane and Grey held aloof from the Council as it was inconsistent with their previously expressed criticisms of the factionalism of the pro-Boers. For Liberal Imperialists the war offered an opportunity to restore the party's patriotic credentials by putting party differences aside and supporting the government.¹² In June 1900 the Imperial Liberal Council scored a propaganda victory when it managed to get thirty-eight Liberal MPs to vote with the government on a pro-Boer motion on the defence estimates, while only thirty Liberal MPs voted for the motion itself.¹³

The initial months of the war saw a series of humiliating setbacks for the British forces, but from early 1900 fortunes changed. The news of the relief of the siege of Mafeking arrived on 18 May, and led to spontaneous patriotic demonstrations in major towns and cities and attacks on the homes of prominent pro-Boers. In Battersea, the future cabinet minister John Burns had his windows smashed by a jingoistic mob.¹⁴ In June Campbell-Bannerman

gave his support to the principle of annexing the two republics, while calling for a swift granting of self-government.¹⁵ With the war apparently won, it was widely expected that the government would call a general election to capitalise on the wave of patriotic feeling that followed British military success. On 25 September Parliament was dissolved and a general election called.

The 'khaki election'

Unionist victory was a foregone conclusion. By the summer of 1899 the Liberal Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone admitted that the party was not up to

fighting a general election¹⁶ and shortly before the dissolution he wrote to his party leader 'I have had some disgusting rebuffs in my appeals for money... a disgusting number of candidates have skied off'.¹⁷ The Liberals allowed the Unionists 143 unopposed returns – an all-time high since the 1867 Reform Act.¹⁸ In its manifesto, the party tried to salvage its patriotic reputation by praising the 'genius' of Lord Roberts, the Commander in Chief in South Africa, as well as criticising both the diplomacy that had led to the war and the government's opportunism in trying to cash in electorally on military success.¹⁹ The Unionists attempted to tar all Liberals

with the pro-Boer brush, Joseph Chamberlain notoriously claiming that 'a vote for the Liberal is a vote for the Boer'.²⁰ The result was a landslide defeat for the Liberals – the first time since before the 1832 Reform Act that they had lost two general elections in a row. John Auld, in his study of the Liberal pro-Boers, has calculated that on average pro-Boer candidates performed around three per cent worse than the average Liberal, although mainstream and imperialist Liberals were not immune from the tide flowing in favour of the Unionists.²¹

This election has been dubbed the first 'khaki election', anticipating that of 1918. However, the view that the election result demonstrated the electorate's support for war and empire has been challenged, particularly by Richard Price and Henry Pelling.²² Price has argued that to the working classes the war was less important than questions of social reform and that local issues had a significant impact on individual results. But while such factors may have made a difference in some constituencies, it remains the case that the war was the dominant issue. The cases cited by Pelling and Price only show that there were a few minor deviations in some constituencies from the broader electoral trend against the Liberals. Until the summer of 1899 the Liberals had been making steady gains at by-elections, to the extent that they might have hoped to win the next general election with a small majority. Their electoral fortunes changed with the outbreak of war. Every by-election fought between the outbreak of war in October 1899 and the summer of 1900 showed a swing to the Unionists as voters rallied to the government's patriotic call.²³ There can be little doubt, therefore, that the war was the decisive factor in the Liberal defeat.

Electoral adversity was not enough to bring the party together. The Imperial Liberal Council continued to scheme against the Campbell-Bannerman leadership. The election result seemed to justify its analysis of the Liberal Party's weaknesses and in October it issued a manifesto that repudiated Campbell-Bannerman and demanded that the party:

Anti-war meetings frequently ended in violence as a result of the attentions of jingo crowds. (*Punch*, 4 April 1900)



... distinguish Liberals in whose policy with regard to Imperial questions patriotic voters may justly repose confidence from those whose opinions naturally disqualify them from controlling the action of the Imperial Parliament.²⁴

Sir Edward Grey threatened to disown Campbell-Bannerman's leadership and even the Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone wobbled, calling on Campbell-Bannerman to support Rosebery and Milner.²⁵

However, neither the pro-Boers nor the Liberal Imperialists were able to influence the party decisively in their direction. Neither group wanted to split from the party, but each wished that their opponents would either leave or keep quiet. The Liberal Imperialists wanted to see a re-launched Liberal Party, shed of its unpopular ideological baggage – a project that bears similarities to the re-branding of the Labour Party as 'New Labour' nearly a century later. However, the Liberal Imperialists lacked a Tony Blair – a leader with the determination to fight and win the internal battles that would have to take place before the party could be reformed. Instead they looked to Rosebery, who continued to remain aloof from politics while tantalising his supporters with speeches that hinted at a return. Lacking clear and decisive leadership, the various Liberal Imperialist attempts to win control of the party were indecisive and unfocused.²⁶

The pro-Boers had their problems too, having had their numbers depleted at the general election and experiencing throughout the war the break-up of their meetings by jingoistic crowds.²⁷ Famously, in 1901, Lloyd George spoke at an anti-war meeting at Birmingham Town Hall, the heart of Joseph Chamberlain's fiefdom, which ended with a riot by a jingoistic crowd.²⁸ With no faction able to deliver a knockout blow to its opponents, Campbell-Bannerman continued to lead as best he could. Attacks on him by Liberal Imperialists consolidated his support on the centre and left of the party. But he was careful to keep lines of communication open with the Liberal Imperialists, especially Asquith.

Methods of barbarism

In the summer of 1901 there was another outbreak of warfare within the party. This was precipitated by the Liberal Imperialists' lionising of Milner when he returned home on leave in May.²⁹ For many Liberals, Milner's intransigence was the reason for war breaking out and for the Boers' refusal to surrender even when their territory had formally been annexed. But the party leadership had to be sensitive about attacking him because Asquith, Grey and Haldane supported him.³⁰

The methods used by the British Army to defeat the Boers were strongly opposed by both pro-Boers and mainstream Liberals. In response to the guerrilla tactics used by the Boer commandos, the British army tried to cut off Boer supplies by rounding up civilians and putting them into concentration camps, and by burning Boer farms. The aim was to starve the Boers into submission. The death rate in the camps was very high: by the end of the war around 28,000 Boers had died in the camps – more than the number of troops on both sides killed in the war.³¹

Emily Hobhouse (sister of the writer L. T. Hobhouse) visited the camps on behalf of the South African Women and Children Distress Fund. On her return to England in 1901, she attempted to publicise her findings, which were very critical of the conditions she had witnessed. She met Campbell-Bannerman who agreed to speak out against the concentration camp policies, which he did at a dinner on 14 June, saying:

A phrase often used is that 'war is war', but when one comes to ask about it one is told that no war is going on, that it is not war. When is a war not a war? When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.³²

Although Campbell-Bannerman's denunciation of 'methods of barbarism' has been a source of pride to Liberals of later eras, at the time it was considered a blunder, even by many of his own supporters, because it was seen as an attack on British troops. Campbell-Bannerman felt the need to clarify his remarks, saying 'I never said a word, which would imply cruelty... on the part of officers or men in the British Army'.³³ The Liberal Imperialists immediately denounced Campbell-Bannerman as he seemed to them to have joined the Pro-Boer camp.

H. C. G. Matthew has pointed out that the crisis over the 'methods of barbarism' speech was in part based on a misunderstanding. Campbell-Bannerman intended to make a specific denunciation of the concentration camps. However, the Liberal Imperialists took it as a move to drive them out of the party. As Haldane put it 'The party must be rescued from getting wholly and uselessly out of relation to the national sense'.³⁴ Even Asquith, who had until this point remained aloof from the internal dispute,

was highly and publicly critical of Campbell-Bannerman. Asquith's Liberal Imperialist supporters organised a dinner for him (a standard method of the time of showing support for a politician), which was widely seen as a direct challenge to Campbell-Bannerman's lead-

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ership. The conflict in the Liberal Party was parodied by the Parliamentary sketchwriter Henry Lucy as 'war to the knife – and fork'.³⁵

In the event, the Asquith dinner was a damp squib. A party meeting at the Reform Club ten days earlier resulted in a vote of confidence for Campbell-Bannerman to which the Liberal Imperialists assented. In addition, Rosebery, having declined to preside at the Asquith dinner, upstaged his potential

ally by speaking at the City Liberal Club on the same day as Asquith's dinner in a speech in which he famously announced his intention to 'plough my furrow alone' – an apparent snub to Asquith.³⁶ Rosebery wanted to see a decisive split in the Liberal Party, but Grey, Asquith and Haldane were unwilling to break away without a commitment from Rosebery to make a political comeback. Given the show of unity at the Reform Club, Asquith could hardly raise the standard of rebellion now and so played down the divisions over South Africa, saying 'I have never called myself a Liberal Imperialist. The name of Liberal is good enough for me'.³⁷

In September the breach widened further when Campbell-Bannerman repudiated the Liberal Imperialist candidate selected by the local Liberal association in the North-East Lanark by-election. He unofficially supported the Independent Labour Party candidate and the Unionists gained the seat with a split Liberal vote.³⁸ This increased the Liberal Imperialists' sense that they were being driven out of the party. They were losing the battle to control the structures of the Liberal Party – in December the National Liberal Federation passed a resolution broadly in line with Campbell-Bannerman's position on the concentration camps.³⁹ It was becoming clear that the party leader, rather than the Liberal Imperialists, could command the support of party organisations at regional and constituency level.⁴⁰

Rosebery's speech at Chesterfield

In order to revive their flagging fortunes, the Liberal Imperialists needed Rosebery who, as an ex-prime minister, had a wider public appeal than Asquith, Haldane or Grey. Rosebery announced his intention to address a meeting at Chesterfield on 16 December, and the Liberal Imperialists hoped this would mark his political comeback. Rosebery again demonstrated his flair for brilliant but enigmatic platform oratory. On the war he appeared con-

ciliatory to both wings of the party. He defended Milner and criticised the expression 'methods of barbarism' but accepted the National Liberal Federation resolution which criticised the camps and urged the government to make peace rather than insist on unconditional surrender.⁴¹

The speech repudiated many of the arguments of the Liberal Imperialists, but they preferred to ignore this as they hoped that Rosebery was now going to return to politics and resume his rightful position at the head of the Liberal Party. Sir Edward Grey wrote bluntly to his party leader that '... if you & Rosebery work together, I have no more to say & no new departure to make; if on the other hand you & he decide that you cannot co-operate I must say this: that I go with him'.⁴² To many Liberals it seemed that the Chesterfield speech was a peace overture. Herbert Gladstone wrote to Campbell-Bannerman 'we ought to sink differences... since there is so much that is broad, generous and wise in what he says...'.⁴³

Campbell-Bannerman, however, had a clearer understanding of Rosebery's intentions. He had noticed that while Rosebery's pronouncements on the war had struck a chord across a wide section of the party, other parts of the speech made demands that would be less palatable to mainstream Liberals. These included abandoning Irish Home Rule and adopting a 'clean slate' in domestic policy – that is repudiating the party's policy programme, which Rosebery saw as 'faddist' and likely to alienate floating voters. Campbell-Bannerman met Rosebery and confirmed that the latter was not envisaging a return to Liberal politics. Campbell-Bannerman wrote to C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, which had joined in the calls for reconciliation between Campbell-Bannerman and Rosebery:

there has been no offer of help to the Party – it was to the Country. He will not join in; even on the war. There never has been... any unwillingness on our part for his return: this is absolute. The impediment is that *he won't*.⁴⁴

Campbell-Bannerman responded pub-



The pro-war press portrayed anti-war Liberals as eccentric and unfashionable. Liberals were criticised for having conceded self-government to the Transvaal after the Battle of Majuba in 1881. (*Punch*, 19 September 1900)

licly to the Chesterfield speech at a meeting of the London Liberal Federation in January and once again declared himself willing to see Rosebery return. In February Rosebery spoke at Liverpool, reiterating the importance of a 'clean slate' in domestic policy and of abandoning Home Rule. Campbell-Bannerman brought matters to a head by pronouncing against Rosebery, saying he was asking Liberals to 'sponge out every article of our creed'.⁴⁵ Rosebery promptly announced his complete separation from Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Party. The Liberal Imperialists set up a new organisation, the Liberal League, with Rosebery as president and Asquith and Grey among the vice-presidents. It appeared to herald the launch of a breakaway political movement. But events took a different course: the peace of Vereeniging on 31 May brought the Boer War to an end and removed the main source of division within the Liberal Party.

The aftermath of the war saw a swift turn of the political tide. Uncomfortable questions were now asked about the government's conduct of a war in

which the world's largest empire had taken two-and-a-half years to defeat two tiny republics. In addition, the war had highlighted Unionist failings in social policy, with recruitment statistics showing a very high number of volunteers unfit for service. This was embarrassing to a party that had championed the cause of empire and an imperial race.⁴⁶ As a recent historian of the Conservative Party has written:

The Conservative Party's problems as the party of empire reached a crisis point with the Boer War. The military weaknesses, administrative incompetence and indeed social problems which the war has revealed laid the Conservatives open to the charge that, as the party of Empire, they had not done a particularly good job.⁴⁷

The Unionist response to these problems made matters worse for them and helped to revive the Liberal Party. In 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, attempting to build on the imperial unity shown by the support of Britain's dominions for the war effort, launched his campaign for tariff reform with the aim of binding the empire together economically. The Liberal Party united behind a defence of free trade, one of its great causes. Asquith, working once again in tandem with Campbell-Bannerman, led the campaign in the country against tariffs. The Unionists split three ways: both free traders and tariff reformers resigned from the government while those in the middle tried in vain to find a workable compromise. In addition, the government's education bill, introduced in 1902, angered the Nonconformist Churches because it proposed state funding of church schools. Liberal Nonconformists, divided over the Boer War, now united to fight the education bill. Within a year of the end of the war the Liberal Party had recorded a steady stream of by-election gains. In 1904, the government's importation of Chinese indentured labourers to work the mines in the Transvaal enabled the Liberals to make political capital both on humanitarian grounds and over the apparent snub to British labour.

The restoration of unity within the Liberal Party was a remarkably easy process. As George L. Bernstein has argued, the war exaggerated the divisions

within the party and factionalising reinforced them. In fact the Liberal Imperialists had more in common with their fellow Liberals than they did with an imperialist visionary like Milner or, for that matter, with the semi-detached Rosebery.⁴⁸ It might be thought therefore, that the Liberal Imperialists were wrong in their analysis of the Liberal Party's electoral problems. Yet this would be an oversimplification. Despite their failure either to win control of the party or to launch a successful breakaway group, the Liberal Imperialists had a profound impact on the future of Liberalism. The party fought the 1906 election on a platform of not implementing Irish Home Rule during that Parliament, thus avoiding accusations of wanting to break up the empire and, with Sir Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, it proclaimed support for continuity with the Unionists in foreign policy. During the 1906–1915 Liberal Government the pacifist wing of the party (who had mostly been Pro-Boers) were able to exert little influence on overseas policy. By 1906, therefore, the party had taken great strides towards ridding itself of the image of being unpatriotic and it was a very different Liberal Party that won the 1906 general election from the one that lost that of 1900. The war had taught the party a lesson.

Iain Sharpe is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group and a Liberal Democrat Councillor in Watford.

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- 2 Matthew, H C G *The Liberal Imperialists: the ideas of politics of a post-Gladstonian elite* (Oxford, 1973)
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- 4 Robinson, Ronald and John Gallagher with Alice Denny *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London: 1961) p. 410 ff.
- 5 The government was a coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. In accordance with contemporary usage I have used the word 'Unionist' to describe the government throughout this article.
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 - 23 Figures taken from Craig, F. W. S. *British parliamentary election results 1885–1918* (London, 1974).
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1900 election

The 'khaki election' of 1900 saw the Liberals performing poorly. **Graem Peters** examines one seat they gained from the Conservatives.

Hastings in 1900

In the general election of 1900, the Liberals made a few gains across the country, recovering slightly from the debacle of 1895 – but the recovery was limited as the Unionist government appealed for support during the South African war. The fact that the constituency of Hastings was one of the gains was something of a surprise.

The sitting Unionist MP in 1900 was William Lucas-Shadwell. He was a local man who had been born and raised in Fairlight, just outside the town. He was known locally for taking a stand on social issues, which endeared him to the working classes. However, at the last minute he chose to stand down, following concerns expressed by the local Conservatives about his voting record (he had frequently voted with the opposition), and the Unionists had to find a new candidate. The man they chose was barrister and architect Edward Boyle KC, selected just eleven days before polling took place. He lived in the neighbouring constituency at Hurst Green, and this was his first contest.

(Boyle was to stand again in the neighbouring seat of Rye three years later, where he was also defeated. His losses were the only two occasions in the twentieth century before 1997 when either Rye or Hastings was lost by the Conservatives. This was not just a case of bad luck for Boyle. He was reputedly not the best of platform speakers, and during an age when public meetings were a major part of an election campaign, how good an orator a candidate was was more important than what he was saying.)

Boyle fared particularly badly in 1900 when compared with the Liberal candidate. In 1900 the Liberals put forward thirty-four year-old Freeman Freeman-Thomas. He had played cricket for Sussex and Cambridge University and was a local JP. He was imposing in an aristocratic way and came across well at his meetings. He was the son-in-law of Lord Brassey, who had himself been Liberal MP for Hastings.

In 1900, the main issue of the campaign was, of course, the Boer War. The Liberal Party was known to be split on the issue. Henry Campbell-Bannerman

and his supporters opposed the war, while Lord Rosebery and his Liberal Imperialist followers supported the Unionists in their war efforts. Freeman-Thomas was an Imperialist and a follower of Rosebery, and was therefore well placed to appeal to the views of wavering Unionist voters in Hastings.

Mrs Lucas-Shadwell, wife of the retiring MP, came out openly in opposition to the Conservatives and their candidate and urged voters to support Freeman-Thomas. He could also call upon influential support in the Liberal Party to help with his campaign in Hastings. As well as being a follower of Rosebery, he was also a personal friend. Rosebery was keen that such a friend and supporter should be returned to the House of Commons, which would make his position in the Liberal Party and the cause of Liberal Imperialism that much stronger. Thus Freeman-Thomas' campaign was well supported by the Roseberyites, and in due course helped him win the seat.

Post-election excuses were made by the Tories; they claimed that the Liberals had intimated that if their man won, Lord Brassey would fund the completion of Hastings harbour. The harbour was never completed, and to this day the local fisherman have to drag their flat-bottomed boats up the beach inland. Freeman-Thomas sat in the Commons until his defeat in 1906, one of only a handful of losses suffered by the Liberals in their greatest election landslide.

Graem Peters is the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for Hastings & Rye.

Election results, Hastings:

1900

Freeman-Thomas (Lib)	3,399	51.6%
Boyle (Con)	3,191	48.4%

1906

Du Cros (Con)	4,348	52.5%
Freeman-Thomas (Lib)	3,935	47.5%

The Liberal Press and the South African War

It is well known that it was the Liberals who fought for and won a free press for this country by effecting the abolition of the 'tax on knowledge', an act which was in large measure responsible for the huge proliferation of cheap newspapers from the mid 1850s onward. It was Liberal theorists too who hoped that this new press would act as a force for educating the newly enfranchised masses into a full appreciation of their rights and duties as voting members within the body politic through the fulfilment of its role as 'the fourth estate'. The role of the Liberals both in theory and in practice in the development of the press in the second half of the nineteenth century has long been recognised as significant. Liberals were prominent in founding, financing and editing new newspapers, both national and provincial.

By the time of the South African War the British press, in whose efficacy as the bridge between governors and governed the Liberals believed so fervently, had almost reached its apogee. Alan Lee has reckoned that in London alone in 1900 there were 472 newspapers, mainly local. Throughout the provinces there were 1,475, while Scotland had 244, Wales 110 and Ireland 182.¹ These figures include all newspapers, but if one considers only the London-based national press, with which I shall be primarily concerned, when war broke out there were thirteen morning and five evening papers. In 1899, of the thirteen morning papers, only four claimed to be Liberal and of the five evening papers three were Liberal. The four morning papers comprised *The Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily News*, the *Morning Leader* and, surprisingly, the *Daily Telegraph*. The evening papers were the *Star*, a sister paper to the *Morning Leader*, the *Echo* and the *Westminster Gazette*. I would like to consider these papers individually before making some general comments about the nature of the Liberal press during the war.

The Daily Telegraph

The newspaper which claimed the largest circulation before the appearance in 1896 of the *Daily Mail* was the *Daily Telegraph*.² Founded in 1855, it was a paper intended to have a broader and more popular appeal than the older newspapers. Its foreign news coverage was said to rival that of *The Times* and it also offered from its early days book reviews, special articles and interviews. Appealing as it did to 'the man on the knifeboard of the omnibus' it always offered a good and comprehensive city page for the many city men who bought it. The paper had been owned by the Lawson family almost from its foundation. By 1899, Sir Edward, who became Lord Burnham in 1903, had been formally in control since 1885, and informally for much longer. Although there was an editor, John Le Sage, Sir Edward was in practice both proprietor and editor; he was 'The Guv'nor'. He vetted and approved the appointment of new staff and he often decided which leaders were to be written and the line to be followed.

When J. L. Garvin became a leader writer on the paper in the summer of 1899, his appointment had to be approved by Sir Edward although he owed it to the paper's chief leader writer and literary editor, W. L. Courtney. Garvin regularly received notes from Sir Edward with instructions as to the subject and line of his leaders. He did not mind this control, for he was politically in accord with Sir Edward, a Liberal Unionist, and had respect for his judgement. Indeed he came to dread the occasions when Sir Edward was absent and the editor took charge, often aided by Lawson's eldest son, Harry. During the 1900 general election Harry Lawson was standing as a Radical Liberal while his father was, in Garvin's words, 'running about to Unionist meetings in the country'. As a result leaders were not always as consistent and clear cut as Garvin would have liked, as both members of the family had to be placated. 'I

was told to say', Garvin complained on one occasion, 'that the Government must be returned by an overwhelming majority but that the opposition were Britons after all'.³ Garvin's annoyance was that of a journalist with strong opinions who had joined a newspaper which he believed to be consistent in its views. The *Daily Telegraph* had altered politically from a paper which supported Gladstone to a Unionist newspaper. Although it billed itself in such trade manuals as the *Willings Press Guide* as a Liberal newspaper, the editorial staff was Unionist and Conservative to a man – mainly Conservative.

Although the *Daily Telegraph* had no known links with any party or government department, informal links with the Conservative party did exist through a member of the editorial staff, E. B. Iwan Muller, a close associate and friend of Arthur Balfour. Muller had other contacts both in the Hotel Cecil and in government. As one of the mainstays of the Conservative Canning Club at Oxford in the early 1880s, he had known both Lord Curzon and Lord Salisbury's heir, Lord Cranborne. Curzon had helped to further his career and remained a friend. In addition, and most importantly for the paper during the war, he was an old friend of Sir Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner in South Africa, whom he had known since his school days.

Before the war the paper consistently looked to and supported Joseph Chamberlain. During the war its stance on the major issues concerning the conduct of the war was, predictably, to criticise the War Office, expose stupid generals and to defend farm burning and the concentration camps, as far as possible. Indeed, as the war progressed any pretence that the newspaper had to be Liberal became increasingly stretched and by the summer of 1901 it was attacking the pro-Boers for giving psychological support to the Boers with as much vigour as any of the Conservative newspapers and dismissing the evidence about the camps with as much evasiveness as the Minister for War, St John Brodrick. Indeed, Emily Hobhouse's report, published on June 19, was not mentioned at all.

The Daily News

The divisions within the Liberal Party which briefly annoyed Garvin during the general election had a far more serious effect on the two leading Liberal newspapers, the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle*. The *Daily News* was claimed to be 'the recognised organ of the Liberal party' by press directories, but by 1899 it was not easy to define what this meant. Founded in 1846, briefly under the editorship of Charles Dickens, and financed by wealthy radical Liberals to support a programme of reform at home, events abroad in the 1890s exposed the divisions within the Liberal Party over Britain's Imperial role and had their effect on the *Daily News*.

E. T. Cook, who was appointed editor in 1895, belonged to the imperialist wing of the party and spoke for it with increasing vigour as imperial issues came to dominate the news pages. Cook had close contacts in South Africa. Edmund Garrett, editor of the *Cape Times* and a forthright supporter of the High Commissioner, was an old friend and colleague from days when they were both on the staff of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Garrett was Cape Town correspondent for the *Daily News* until the summer of 1899. Cook was also a personal friend of Milner, whom he had known from the days when he was a brilliant undergraduate at New College, Oxford and Milner a newly appointed fellow.

This was to influence the editorial views of the *Daily News* when South African affairs became prominent on the news pages. Cook, like Sir Edward Lawson, followed Chamberlain's lead in the months before war broke out. He also defended Milner vigorously, notably after the publication of his helot despatch. Cook's appointment had been unwelcome to many radical Liberals, who had always looked upon the *Daily News* as their voice. Eventually, early in 1901, Lloyd George, by then one of the Parliamentary leaders of the 'pro-Boers', arranged for the paper to be purchased by a syndicate headed by two wealthy Liberal businessmen, on the understanding that the *Daily News* would take a neutral position on the war and concentrate on important

home issues. Cook was forced to resign and was replaced by Rudi Lehmann, then on the staff of *Punch*, who himself resigned after only seven months.

The troubles of the paper continued, reflecting clashes between different styles of Liberalism and between Lloyd George and the financial backers he had secured.⁴ However, although in theory the paper was supposed to ignore the war, in practice it did not. The issue of farm burning which had in fact gone on ever since Lord Roberts entered the Free State in the spring of 1900, was assiduously followed by the newly radicalised *Daily News* and by the end of May 1901 it was plain that the paper had decided to take up the conduct of the war systematically. No other paper had so much information about the devastation of farms and crops.

No other paper had such full coverage of the concentration camps. It was the *Daily News* that carried the first formal protest against the policy in a letter from Joshua Rowntree and gave the fullest coverage to Emily Hobhouse's report. She herself had insisted on giving the text to the *Daily News* for exclusive coverage. The paper printed a summary running to more than a page and there followed during the next few weeks many letters expressing concern and horror at the short-sightedness of the policy. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that there was more to this than moral indignation; it was part of a concerted plan to pull the Liberal Party together behind Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in a radical programme, using a highly emotive issue which could only embarrass a Government already floundering as the war dragged on unsuccessfully and expensively.

The Daily Chronicle

The *Daily Chronicle* had had a somewhat chequered career in terms of its value to the Liberal Party, since it started publication in 1876. This was to continue throughout the war. In its early days it had little political content or foreign news, being largely devoted to advertising. During the 1880s it had taken a Unionist position on Ireland, only returning wholly to Gladstonian

Liberalism in 1890. In 1894 Henry Massingham, who had been the assistant editor since 1886, became editor. At the time he seemed to be a supporter of Lord Rosebery's version of Liberalism, a position which he soon abandoned. His second-in-command, Henry Norman, remained a Liberal Imperialist while Massingham veered increasingly to the left of the party, more particularly on foreign issues and imperialism. The staff whom he engaged were like-minded. Harold Spender, his Parliamentary correspondent, was a Liberal radical; so too were Vaughan Nash, his labour correspondent, and Henry Nevinson, war correspondent, leader writer and literary editor. Henry Norman resigned in May 1899, leaving a clear field for Spender and Nevinson as Massingham's chief assistants.

During the months before war broke out, the paper became increasingly uneasy and critical of Government policy in South Africa and by the summer of 1899 was voicing all the arguments against intervention in the Transvaal and acting as the most important public sounding board for 'pro-Boer' opinions. However, Frank Lloyd, owner of the paper since 1876, did not like Massingham's policy on the Transvaal, which was affecting turnover, and it was rumoured that Mrs Lloyd disap-

proved of the paper's attacks on the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, the influential Imperialist editor of the *Methodist Times*. Massingham was ordered not to express views on South African affairs. This was tantamount to dismissal, for no editor could possibly remain silent on the main issue of the day and on November 21 1899, Massingham duly resigned.

Thereafter the paper became impeccably Imperialist on the war. Spender and Nash both resigned, but Nevinson stayed on. At the time of the change he was locked up in Ladysmith during the siege and it was some weeks before he heard the news. It was a blow, for, as he mourned in his diary, 'all my influence is gone'. When he returned to England he found that this was indeed so: the new editor, J. H. Fisher, whom he came to detest, allowed him little leeway even in the choice of books for review. He tried to move to the *Daily News* without success, but, somewhat ironically, was consoled by the civilised presence in the *Chronicle* office of E. T. Cook, who was taken on to write leaders for the paper after leaving the *Daily News*.⁵

A new paper?

The fortunes of these two newspapers horrified many radical Liberals opposed to the war at the time. It seemed to them that a vital element in the public discussion of Britain's role in the world, the moral basis of British hegemony, was under threat of being stifled. For these two papers represented and were read by the type of middle-class, educated Liberal who also read *The Times*.

Most educated Liberals saw 1900 as the year when their Press was totally emasculated because it had no significant national voice. When the *Daily Chronicle* changed sides, an attempt was made to raise funds for a new Liberal newspaper to fill the perceived gap in the market. The prime movers in the scheme, apart from Massingham himself, were a group of radical Liberals, all 'pro-Boer', who included Vaughan Nash, Frederick Mackarness, a radical lawyer prominent in the South African Conciliation Committee, Lady Carlisle and her son-in-law, Professor Gilbert Murray.

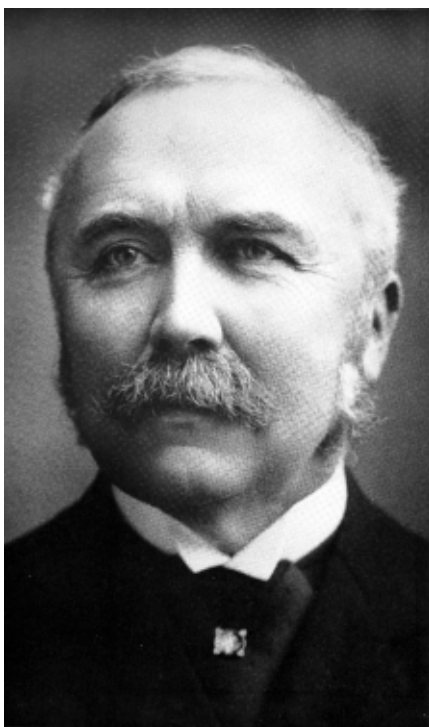
It was hoped that Sir John Brunner, one of the founders of ICI and well known for his radicalism and his interests in the press, would finance the scheme, but this was not to be. Massingham estimated that at least £250,000 would be needed to start a new paper. It was never collected; by early March 1900 £28,329 had been promised, very little of which was ever received. In the meantime, the *Manchester Guardian*, which had taken Massingham on as its London editor and found space both for Vaughan Nash and Harold Spender in Manchester, filled the gap. Copies of the paper were sent to London and, according to J. L. Hammond, could be bought in Fleet Street by 9.30 in the morning. Hammond's own weekly paper, *The Speaker*, was also regarded by his friends as to some extent a substitute for the *Chronicle* during the period between Massingham's resignation and the acquisition of the *Daily News* fourteen months later for the radical cause.⁶

The Morning Leader

But there were always alternatives to the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle*. There were the two newspapers in which Sir John Brunner had a financial interest, the *Morning Leader* and the *Star*. The *Morning Leader*, founded in 1892, was by 1899 edited by Ernest Parke. It is a paper which has been largely ignored in press histories. Where they do mention it, it is to dismiss it as being of little political importance.⁷ It had, apparently, no contacts with the government or leading politicians. H. N. Brailsford, who was happy to write leaders for it in 1900 when the choice of newspapers to work for was severely limited for 'pro-Boer' Liberal intellectuals like himself, remarked somewhat patronisingly to Gilbert Murray, 'It is cheap, popular and sometimes vulgar but it is staunch and loyal, has a good circulation and is preparing to reform itself into as good a paper as one can expect for ½d'.⁸

The *Morning Leader* was certainly different from the other Liberal morning papers. Its primary aim, in good traditional Liberal fashion, was to educate

Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836–1908), leader of the Liberal Party 1899–1908



its readership, but it had also adapted to the new journalism. It was easier to read, having only five columns on a page in place of the six or seven favoured by most other morning daily papers and using a larger font throughout. It was also illustrated, with a daily cartoon and other pictures of current interest.

Education on the issues of the day was provided in its leaders, which tended to review and criticise the whole range of editorial opinion on Fleet Street. This was supplemented by special articles on the subjects of the day, some serious, some frankly satirical and intended to entertain. It did not aim at the highly educated intellectual elite of the party. Some idea of those who did read it is provided by the newspaper itself. At the end of October 1899, it offered to its readership a cheap news telegram service. On November 1 the paper reported that the first subscriber was 'a London tradesman – who desired to post the news in his shop window for the benefit of his customers and the public generally'. During the first few days, the paper subsequently announced:

Not only did tradesmen in remote country towns accept the idea initiated in London and seek to become news purveyors to their neighbours; instances came to hand of bands of men engaged in some common employment clubbing together to obtain the service. In one case the clerks of a big waterworks sent an order, in another soldiers in barracks, in a third men working on some large engineering job in a remote district of Wales.

Its readership, judging from its substantial letter columns, also included many nonconformist clergymen mainly, but not exclusively, from London. It seems to have appealed to women too.

The Star

Its sister paper, the *Star*, was slightly older. Founded in 1888 under the legendary editorship of T. P. O'Connor, with a talented staff, including Massingham and George Bernard Shaw, it was and remained uncompromisingly and consistently radical, more so than either the *Daily News* or the *Daily Chronicle*. It aimed to represent and unify the opin-

ions of the different radical movements while providing its readership with excellent literary and music criticism. So its letter pages accommodated Fabians, Trade Unionists and Marxists, while Richard Le Gallienne and George Bernard Shaw wrote respectively of literature and music. It had a pungent style of presentation, including headlines in language aimed both to attract immediate attention and to proclaim the paper's stance, which by 1899 had become more familiar and popularised through the *Daily Mail* than it had been a decade earlier. By 1899 O'Connor had long departed and the editor was Ernest Parke.

The role of the *Star* was dismissed by Francis Williams as of little importance, particularly in capturing the widespread attention of the all-important lower middle class mass readership. But reading its pages one cannot but be struck by its sharp freshness in support of a frankly 'anti-jingo' policy, or by its combination, in the space of a mere four pages, of the essentials of the latest news, comment upon it, regular coverage of labour issues and book reviews and theatre criticisms.

Whether or not the *Star* and the *Morning Leader* had significant influence, what that was and why they foundered are questions which might bear re-examination. During the war neither ever wavered in their sympathies for the Boers; indeed they were so sympathetic that in 1900 Milner made sure that their chief apologist for President Kruger was publicly exposed as a Boer agent in the pay of the Transvaal Government. This was Reginald Statham, one time editor of a newspaper in Natal, leader writer for the *Daily News* during the first Anglo-Boer war, and the first journalist in England to popularise the theory of a capitalist conspiracy on the Rand aimed against the Transvaal Government, financed by the Randlords, including Cecil Rhodes and operating through a bought Press, soon to be more widely popularised by J.A. Hobson.⁹

The Echo

Radical Liberals were also able to look to another evening paper, the *Echo*. Founded in 1868, it was the first half-

penny evening newspaper, which from the start was noted for its advanced Liberal views. From 1876 it was owned by J. Passmore Edwards, Liberal MP for Salisbury, and well known as the founder of many public libraries and institutions. The *Echo* was his voice until the end of 1897 when he sold it, together with the *Morning Herald*, to the Liberal MP and businessman, Thomas Lough, and to John Barker, who was elected MP for Maidstone in 1900. They appointed Sir Hugh Gilzean Reid, also a Liberal MP and proprietor of several successful newspapers in Scotland and the North of England, as manager and William Crook as editor.

Crook was an Irishman, son of the founder of the Methodist College in Belfast. He had himself been a teacher when he first came to England, but had for many years also been a journalist, writing regularly for Hugh Price Hughes's *Methodist Times* under the pseudonym 'Historicus'. As editor of the *Echo* he continued Passmore Edwards's radical Liberalism. When war started he soon fell out with Price Hughes, who disliked his 'pro-Boer' attitude, and ceased to write for the *Methodist Times*. At the end of that year he was also forced to resign as editor of the *Echo*. The paper was making a loss and he and his unpopular views on South Africa were blamed. Crook himself blamed the proprietors for having poured too much money into their other newspaper, the *Morning Herald*, which had never done well and was eventually sold on and amalgamated into the new *Daily Express*.

Like the *Star*, the *Echo* had only four pages, but it too managed to cram in a vast amount of information about news and current affairs, trade union matters, sport and entertainment. Crook continued to write for it even after he ceased to be editor and, of course, later he took on the post of chief publicist for the Liberal Party, but the *Echo* was more non-committal in its coverage of the war after Crook resigned.¹⁰

The Westminster Gazette

The most significant of the evening papers was the *Westminster Gazette*. Like all evening papers it was not pri-



J. A. Spender (1862–1942), editor of the *Westminster Gazette* 1896–1921

marily a newspaper. Indeed sometimes it hardly bothered with news at all, preferring to use its space for ample comment combined with articles of general interest. Founded in 1892 on the initiative of E. T. Cook to replace the *Pall Mall Gazette* as an evening paper in the Liberal interest (after the latter had been purchased by John Jacob Astor and changed its politics), it had been edited by J. A. Spender since Cook's departure to edit the *Daily News* in 1895. It was owned by Sir George Newnes who accepted consistent losses during his period of ownership because, under Cook and Spender, it became the most prestigious national evening paper of the day.

Spender used his editorial pulpit to preach sweet reason. He approached any question with an open mind and he was more prepared to examine it from several angles than any other editor on Fleet Street. His leaders were required reading for cabinet ministers and members of the opposition alike even if those with strong partisan views, such as Leonard Courtney's wife Janet, complained that he was a 'wobbler'. Politically his links were with the Liberal Party and he was in the confidence of the party leadership. His links with Asquith at a later date are well known, but he was equally close to Sir Henry

Campbell-Bannerman, elected leader of the party at the start of 1899, a relationship which developed during the South African war.

Campbell-Bannerman seems to have become acquainted with Spender through his friend and fellow Scottish MP James Bryce. Sir Henry found Spender an intelligent and sympathetic supporter to whom he could send advance copies of speeches delivered in Scotland, secure in the knowledge that they would be properly reported in the *Westminster Gazette*. The Press Association, which in Scotland was dominated by representatives of the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*, both papers hostile to Campbell-Bannerman, and the national London-based papers therefore received mangled and inadequate reports of his Scottish speeches.

During the khaki election of 1900 Spender also provided the Liberal leader with an aide to help him to write speeches and present himself to the public.¹ But despite these close links with the Liberal leadership Spender never provided the uncompromising support which one finds in the *Daily Chronicle* under Massingham or Rudi Lehmann's *Daily News*. Spender did not want war; he saw no necessity for it. Like his friend Bryce he blamed the new diplomacy of Chamberlain for an unnecessary war, but once war came Spender, like many Liberals, saw no option but to bend before the storm, hope it would all be over soon and prepare for a generous, liberal settlement.

Even after hopes of achieving this were dashed, Spender was still temperamentally incapable of taking a hard line. For instance, he condemned the concentration camps but, typically, argued that their shortcomings must be the result of mismanagement and not deliberate policy.

Conclusions

Such was the national Liberal press at the time of the South African war. Certain features are striking.

First, it was not a press dominated by groups and cartels motivated primarily by profits and circulation figures. Most of these papers were small businesses, some

were family businesses. Consequently all were undercapitalised and had plant and equipment badly in need of modernisation. None of them could hope to compete with a new paper like the *Daily Mail* which had invested in the latest equipment which allowed it to reach unprecedented circulation figures.

Secondly it was not a press which put news first and foremost, like the American press of the time, upon which the new tabloid newspapers, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*, modelled themselves. Debate and comment in leaders and articles was still regarded as being of equal importance and, in the case of evening papers, perhaps even greater importance. These two factors were both disadvantageous to the wide dissemination of a Liberal view of the war.

But even more disadvantageous was the third point; the lack of any uniform pattern or homogeneity in the Liberal press, any more than there was in the Liberal Party at that time. At the outbreak of war the Liberal section of the national press had been profoundly affected by the various arguments within the party and was divided, not over social aims, but over the question of union and, increasingly, over the problems arising from the existence of the British Empire. From 1895, with the election of Lord Salisbury's coalition Government of Conservatives and Unionists and the appointment of the former Liberal, Joseph Chamberlain to the post of Colonial Secretary this latter question became ever more dominant and divisive within both party and press. This is reflected in the very variable approach which the different papers took to the issues raised by the war. The lack of unanimity in the party on most of the major issues, remained throughout the war a weakness constantly on show in the Liberal press and constantly exploited by its opponents.

Dr Jacqueline Beaumont is a Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes University. This paper is based on her talk to the Liberal Democrat History Group meeting on 3 July 2000, 'Liberalism and the Boer War'.

1 Alan Lee, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1855–1914' in Ed Boyce,

- Curran and Wingate *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London 1978), p. 121. See too Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press 1855–1914* (London 1980) pp. 274–80 for more detailed tables.
- 2 For the *Daily Telegraph* see Lord Burnham 'Peterborough Court: The Story of the *Daily Telegraph*' (1955).
 - 3 For Garvin and the *Daily Telegraph* see David Ayerst 'Garvin of the *Observer*', especially chapter 2. The quotation is taken from Garvin's letter to his wife Christina dated 3 Oct 1900. The letters are owned by Garvin's grandson, Professor John Ledingham, to whom I am grateful for permission to quote from them.
 - 4 Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* vol 1, London 1981 pp. 362–66 for Cook, pp. 397–404 for changes during the war. Koss's volume is the chief source of information for many of the newspapers referred to in this paper. For an account of the *Daily News* during this period, which may not be entirely reliable see Archibald Marshall *Out and About. Random Reminiscences* pp. 85–89. Marshall, who was a friend and admirer of Lehmann, suggests that Lehmann was forced out of the editorship. Gerald Shaw *The Garrett Papers*, Van Riebeck Society, Second Series, No 15, Cape Town 1984 pp. 1–39.
 - 5 For the *Daily Chronicle* see Koss op. cit., A. Havighurst, *H. W. Massingham*, Bodleian Library Ms Eng Misc e 610/6 Journal of H. W. Nevinston Feb 1899 – March 1900.
 - 6 Bodleian Library: Ms Harcourt 32 3.12.1899 Letter from John Morley to Harcourt with Massingham's comment as to cost of a new paper. Bodleian Library: Ms Murray 7 E7 for subscribers and figures in the attempt to float a new paper.
 - 7 See for instance Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate* London 1957 pp. 134–5.
 - 8 Bodleian Library, Ms Murray 124 11.1.1900 Letter from H. N. Brailsford to Gilbert Murray
 - 9 R. F. Statham *My Life's Record: A Fight for Justice*. London 1901. Statham regularly wrote letters to the *Star* expressing views sympathetic towards the Transvaal and the Kruger regime in the months before war broke out.
 - 10 This paragraph is based upon information in letters in the Crook papers; Bodleian Library: Ms Eng Lett d 380. See too Stephen Koss, op. cit.
 - 11 F Wilson Harris, *J. A. Spender*, London 1946, Koss op. cit. for the *Westminster Gazette*.

Research in Progress

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 2) for inclusion here.

The party agent and English electoral culture, c.1880 – c.1906. The development of political agency as a profession, the role of the election agent in managing election campaigns during this period, and the changing nature of elections, as increased use was made of the press and the platform. *Kathryn Rix, Christ's College, Cambridge, CB2 2BU; awr@bcs.org.uk.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16. *Andrew Gardner, 22 Birdbrook House, Popham Road, Islington, London N1 8TA; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.*

The Hon H. G. Beaumont (MP for Eastbourne 1906–10). Any information welcome, particularly on his political views (he stood as a Radical). *Tim Beaumont, 40 Elms Road, London SW4 9EX.*

Edmund Lamb (Liberal MP for Leominster 1906–10). Any information on his election and period as MP; wanted for biography of his daughter, Winfred Lamb. *Dr David Gill, d.gill@appleonline.net.*

Joseph King (Liberal MP for North Somerset during the Great War). Any information welcome, particularly on his links with the Union of Democratic Control and other opponents of the war (including his friend George Raffalovich). *Colin Houlding; COLGUDIN@aol.com*

The political life and times of Josiah Wedgwood MP. Study of the political life of this radical MP, hoping to shed light on the question of why the Labour Party replaced the Liberals as the primary popular representatives of radicalism in the 1920s. *Paul Mulvey, 112 Richmond Avenue, London N1 0LS; paulmulvey@yahoo.com.*

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

Liberals and the local government of London 1919–39. *Chris Fox, 173 Worplesdon Road, Guildford GU2 6XD; christopher.fox7@virgin.net.*

Crouch End or Hornsey Liberal Association or Young Liberals in the 1920s and 1930s; especially any details of James Gleeson or Patrick Moir, who are believed to have been Chairmen. *Tony Marriott, Flat A, 13 Coleridge Road, Crouch End, London N8 8EH.*

The Liberal Party and foreign and defence policy, 1922–88; of particular interest are the 1920s and 30s, and the possibility of interviewing anyone involved in formulating party foreign and defence policies. *Dr R. S. Grayson, 8 Cheltenham Avenue, Twickenham TW1 3HD.*

Liberal foreign policy in the 1930s. Focussing particularly on Liberal anti-appeasers. *Michael Kelly, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN*

The Liberal Party and the wartime coalition 1940–45. Sources, particularly on Sinclair as Air Minister, and on Harcourt Johnstone, Dingle Foot, Lord Sherwood and Sir Geoffrey Maunders (Sinclair's PPS) particularly welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; ian.hunter@curtishunter.co.uk.*

The grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party 1945–64; the role of local activists in the late 1950s revival of the Liberal Party. *Mark Egan, 42 Richmond Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 1LN.*

The Unservile State Group, 1953–1970s. *Dr Peter Barberis, 24 Lime Avenue, Flixton, Manchester M41 5DE.*

The Young Liberal Movement 1959–1985; including in particular relations with the leadership, and between NLYL and ULS. *Carrie Park, 89 Coombe Lane, Bristol BS9 2AR; clp25@hermes.cam.ac.uk.*

The political and electoral strategy of the Liberal Party 1970–79. Individual constituency papers, and contact with members of the Party's policy committees and/or the Party Council, particularly welcome. *Ruth Fox, 7 Mulberry Court, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM23 3JW.*

The Peacemonger

Lord Davies was one who stood for great ideals, for which he was ready to spend his health and his fortune. He had the imagination of a poet; he saw great visions. His deep sincerity, his great generosity, his burning faith made him one of those rare beings who overcome obstacles and change the course of history.

*Viscount Cecil of Chelwood*¹

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

*Tribute of the King Edward VII Welsh
National Memorial Association*²

David Davies, the first Baron Davies of Llandinam, was born on 11 May 1880 at Llwynderw, Llandinam, Montgomeryshire, the first child (and only son) of Edward Davies who three years earlier had married his cousin Mary Jones, the daughter of the Revd. Evan Jones of Trewythen. There were also to be two daughters of the marriage, Gwendoline Elizabeth (1882–1951) and Margaret Sidney ('Daisy') (1884–1963), who were eventually to become the two famous Davies sisters of Gregynog Hall, Newtown.

Edward had been the only son of the first David Davies (1818–90), popularly known as 'Top Sawyer', an enormously successful capitalist and philanthropist who had amassed a huge personal fortune from the collieries, railways and docks of south Wales, and who had himself served as the Liberal MP for Cardigan Boroughs from 1874 to 1886. 'Top Sawyer' had been highly regarded as the epitome of all that was best in the Welsh, nonconformist way of life, and was deeply revered in his native Montgomeryshire. Mary Davies had died in 1888, leaving the three infant children to be brought up by their maternal aunt Elizabeth Jones who four years later married her brother-in-law, thus becoming the second Mrs Edward Davies. Edward, who had himself suffered from indifferent health for a number of years, died in 1898, leaving David Davies II, at just eighteen years of age, and his two younger sisters as the joint ben-

eficiaries of a cash estate exceeding £2,000,000, more than 10,000 acres of land, a substantial shareholding in the Cambrian railways and a controlling interest in the renowned Ocean Coal Company and Barry Docks. The young David thus found an array of industrial responsibilities thrust upon him, but he also enjoyed the unwavering support of his stepmother who possessed exceptional intelligence and ability. He also shared the energy, enterprise and determination of his grandfather.

David Davies was educated at Merchiston Castle, a public school in Edinburgh, where rugby football was regarded as vital and where he was dubbed '110% man', and at King's College, Cambridge from 1899 to 1903, where he graduated in history. At Cambridge he was viewed as an avid nonconformist and teetotaler, and was described as 'an impetuous Welshman with a great sense of humour and an infectious laugh'.³ Upon graduation Davies went on big game expeditions to Alaska, Vancouver and Washington, and he owned a ranch in Edmonton, Canada from 1907 until 1918. During 1904 he also spent a considerable period in Japan, and was one of the few westerners to be a long-term eye-witness of the Russo-Japanese conflict.

Upon his return home to Wales, Davies devoted his energies to improving agricultural practices on the Llandinam estate, and became one of the most avid of the founders of the Welsh National Agricultural Society. Welsh native breeds of cattle were conscientiously nurtured at Llandinam, and Davies is himself credited with saving the Welsh pig from extinction. He also developed a keen interest in fox hunting, diligently building up his own pack of foxhounds, and acquiring, too, his own pack of beagles. Other pursuits included shooting, rearing pheasants and entertaining his wide range of friends and acquaintances to good sport. In 1906 he became chairman of the Ocean Colliery group, one of the largest employers of labour in south Wales, with coal mines centred on the Rhondda and Taff Vale area.

In the landslide Liberal victory of the same year David Davies began his active political career when he succeeded A. C. Humphreys-Owen, Glansevern, as the Liberal MP for his native Montgomeryshire.⁴

In many ways he was a very strange choice. Both his grandfather 'Top Sawyer' and his father Edward had turned Liberal Unionist back in 1886, and he himself conspicuously diverged from the party line on most political issues: he was flatly opposed to Irish home rule, he tended to favour tariff reform on the lines advocated by Joseph Chamberlain (perhaps endorsing the taxation of imported food), he was not a supporter of church disendowment, and had even come out in opposition to Lloyd George's campaign against the provisions of Balfour's 1902 Education Act. He adhered to the party line only over temperance (he remained a teetotaler), and he was a fervent Calvinistic Methodist. Some Montgomeryshire Tories hoped that he might well be caajoled into joining their ranks.

Indeed in 1906 Davies entered parliament unopposed, standing on a highly personal, ambivalent political platform which combined policies taken from both the Liberal and Conservative election manifestos, apparently having won over both local parties.⁵ He thus entered the Commons like some eighteenth-century landowner, at once voicing his heartfelt distaste for the cut-and-thrust of parliamentary life. Very rarely did he participate in Commons debates, and he could never shed a consciousness of feeling ill at ease when speaking in public. Neither did he feel closely bound by party ties. Generally he preferred to rely on the services of the huge personal staff which he built up, and he was anxious to discourage the formation of a local party organisation within Montgomeryshire. Parliamentary procedure and niceties repelled him.

Within his constituency, however, Davies' position was totally secure. On the eve of the First World War the local Conservative press could write of the county's agricultural communities: 'In recent years they have given themselves over to, not Radicalism by any means, but the cult of David Daviesism. They have nothing in common with the Radical-Socialism which nowadays masquerades under the name of Liberalism'.⁶ During his early years in the Commons Davies had certainly gone his own way; he had voted against the land clauses of Lloyd

George's 'People's Budget' of 1909, and in 1910 he pronounced publicly against Irish home rule.⁷

The impact of war

David Davies' life, like that of so many of his contemporaries, was transformed by the outbreak of war in September 1914. He served in the South Wales Borderers and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and by November he had attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel and was channelling his prodigious energies into the raising of a new battalion – the 14th RWF Caernarvon and Anglesey. Although military life was completely new to him, his fertile imagination was totally captured by the necessity for rigorous military training, and he readily expended his own personal resources in purchasing field telephones, a supply of bicycles and other equipment, while also making available his own hunters for use as chargers.

His own unit, subjected to an uniquely vigorous training in Snowdonia, reached the western front in December 1915, and spent the first five months in the trenches around Laventie, Festubert and Givenchy. Davies' impetuosity as a commanding officer soon became proverbial, as did his propensity for experiments with unconventional weapons and for schemes to lure the enemy troops out of their trenches. But he developed a profound distaste for the squalor and filth of trench warfare and the massive loss of life which had already taken place. While on leave from his battalion during January 1916 he spoke freely in the House of Commons, pleading for changes in recruiting methods and in the production of munitions.

In June he was suddenly recalled to England and was appointed parliamentary private secretary to David Lloyd George on his becoming Secretary of State for War. One of the future prime minister's biographers has described Davies as 'a talkative, wealthy and light-hearted young Welshman in whose friendship and gossip he [Lloyd George] took much delight at this time'.⁸

During the successive critical months Davies played a key role in

keeping Lloyd George informed of the mood of the rank and file of the Parliamentary Liberal Party by keeping his ear to the ground in the smoking rooms and lobbies of the House of Commons and the clubs of Westminster.⁹ At this point the personal rapport between the two men was evidently very close; in November Davies was responsible for purchasing and furnishing a flat in St James's Court for his ally. He also made persistent overtures concerning the purchase of the *Westminster Gazette* 'in the Government interest'.¹⁰

During these fateful months, too, he made soundings of his Liberal parliamentary colleagues to discover their feelings towards a possible Lloyd George premiership, and during the crucial first week of December it was Davies, together with Dr Christopher Addison and F. G. Kellaway, who was primarily responsible for motivating support for Lloyd George. When his ally duly became prime minister and formed his renowned 'Garden Suburb', Davies received his reward, becoming one of his inner circle of trusted advisers and given a special responsibility for the drink trade and its possible state purchase. He was also responsible for liaison between the War Office and the 'Garden Suburb', and he visited Petrograd as a member of Lord Milner's delegation for the only Allied conference to be convened in Russia. Sensing at first hand the imminent collapse of the Czarist regime, he hastened to keep Lloyd George informed of developments in Russia.

Thereafter, however, the warm rapport between the two men rapidly crumbled. Davies' self-image as a 'self-appointed candid friend' soon antagonised both the prime minister and some of his closest associates. He was soon reduced to self-parody as 'a harmless sort of lunatic – always grouching and criticising'.¹¹ In his lengthy epistles to Lloyd George, Davies engaged in virulent criticism of many of their parliamentary colleagues, the general conduct of the allied war effort, the failure of the allies to render greater assistance to Serbia, and finally the government's decision to permit a 33.33 per cent increase in the brewing of beer. The crunch came in June 1917 when it was

announced that Lord Northcliffe rather than Balfour had been appointed the head of a high-powered mission to the United States to precipitate American entry into the war. Davies was unrestrained in his criticism:

23.6.17

My dear Chief,

I have seen various people of all colours this week and the impression left on my mind is that the Govt. stock and yours in particular, is tumbling down. The Reform [Club] is seething with discontent, and even the Tories are beginning to ask questions. ...

It's no good, my dear Chief, you can't go on fooling the people indefinitely. They take you at your word – if you play them false they will send you to Coventry with Winston. They thought you *were* a man of his word, who would not tolerate delay, who would make a clean sweep of incompetents – ministers or soldiers. They thought you *were* out to win the war for the vindication of the principles we are fighting for. Making the fullest allowances for all the tremendous difficulties which have beset your path, have you employed the best means of fulfilling these expectations – have you run the straight course? Have you set your teeth and done what was obviously the right thing – regardless of other considerations? This was the one course which could bring you success and victory in the long run. The moral factor is the only one which counts in the end, and that is why so many brilliant people come to grief. ...

You can call me anything you like my dear Chief – it's damned unpleasant – but it is the truth.

Yrs.

Dafydd bob man ¹²

By return of post came Lloyd George's devastating response:

24 June, 1917

My dear Davies,

I regret having to tell you that there is a concerted attack to be made upon me for what is called 'sheltering' in a soft job a young officer of military age and fitness. I am told that the attack is associated with the efforts made to re-inforce the Army by re-examining the rejects. It is urged that it is a scandal to force men of doubtful fitness into the fighting line when others whose physical efficiency is beyond question are shirking under powerful protection. I hear that Welsh parents – North and South – are highly indignant and

do not scruple to suggest that your wealth is your shield. I know that you are not responsible, but they blame me, and as I know that you are anxious not to add to my difficulties in the terrible task entrusted to me, I am sure you will agree that I am taking the straight course intimating to the Committee set up to re-examine men in the public service that in my judgement you can render better service to your country as a soldier than in your present capacity.

I have put this quite bluntly to you, as I have always found you preferred plain speaking, however disagreeable. My only apology is for having withheld from you so long rumours which were detrimental to your patriotism and courage, both of which I know to be beyond reproach.

Ever sincerely,
DLIG¹³

The attack was blatantly unfair, for Davies had commanded his battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in France with bravery and distinction. His dismissal from the Cabinet Secretariat at this point heralded a permanent rift with the Prime Minister, an irrevocable parting of the ways. It was Davies' subsequent ambition to return to command a battalion in France, but he soon found his ambitions thwarted, probably by Lloyd George.

The cause of world peace

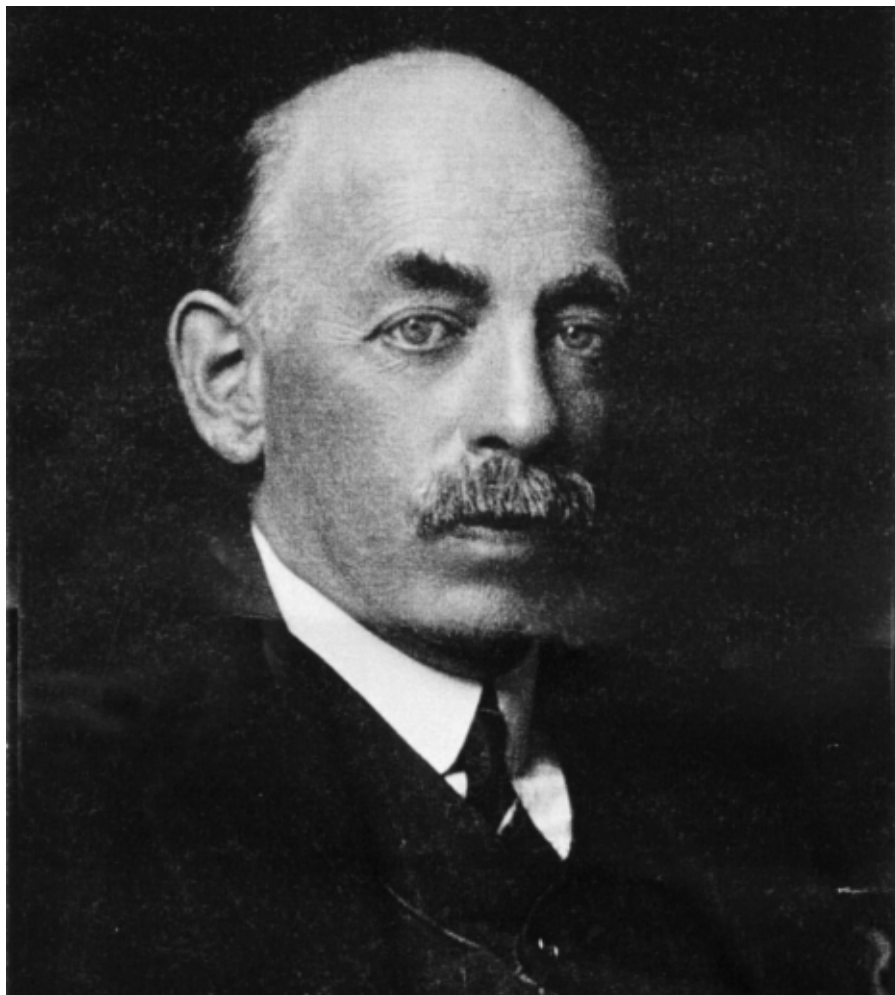
It was then his lot to make use of his parliamentary platform to press for an improved conduct of the Allied war effort and for some consideration of the pressing issues which would inevitably accompany the peace. He became almost totally divorced from party politics and began to interest himself in the idea of a League of Nations to exclude the possibility of a similar world conflict in future. As he mulled over in his mind his terrible experiences on the western front, he became convinced that another world war must be outlawed. Thereafter he spoke regularly in the Commons on the necessity to establish a League of Free Nations.

Davies was one of those who promoted a national conference held at Llandrindod in June 1918 to discuss a measure of devolution for Wales. Inevitably perhaps, it soon became a notably

damp squib. In 1919, together with his two sisters, he endowed the Wilson Chair of International Politics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (the first chair of its kind at any British university), dedicated to the memory of those students who had perished in the conflict, to foster the study of the inter-related problems of law and politics, ethics and economics, raised by the project of the League of Nations. The first holder of the new chair was the eminent political scientist Sir Alfred Zimmern who soon distinguished himself in the position. His eventual successors included prominent historian Charles Webster and E. H. Carr, an outstanding authority on international relations, notably on the affairs of Soviet Russia.

The League of Nations Union duly came into being on 13 October 1918 shortly before the signing of the Armistice with a founder membership of 3,000. Sir Edward Grey was its first president, distinguished Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray was chairman, and Davies was vice-chairman. All three were prominent and respected Liberals. In 1919 David Davies was one of the primary instigators of the formation of the International Federation of the League of Nations Societies, and in 1922 he was one of the founders of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations Union to which he donated the princely sum of £30,000 to establish an endowment fund.¹⁴ It soon proved a most flourishing body in Welsh life. Thereafter Davies journeyed to the USA in pursuit of co-operation with American peace societies.

This impassioned quest for international peace extended to a number of ambitious initiatives. It was even proposed, following the death of Lord Northcliffe in 1922, that David Davies might purchase *The Times* newspaper for £1,500,000. He responded characteristically positively, calculating that a controlling interest might be purchased for £900,000; he himself was to put up £500,000, and his two sisters the residue. The venture was to be wholly philanthropic with all profits donated to charity. It was even suggested that former prime minister David Lloyd George, recently ousted



David Davies, first baron Davies of Llandinam (1880–1944)

from power, might serve as editor (a scenario unique in the history of British journalism). But the bizarre proposal soon became a damp squib. Another ultimately abortive proposal was that a national 'Temple of Peace' might be built on the site of Devonshire House, Piccadilly.

Throughout the 1920s David Davies devoted himself above all else to the cause of world peace, making use of the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union to exert pressure on the League of Nations to adopt a more aggressive policy. He spared no effort to secure the return of the USA to the League. A succession of conferences on international education was held at Gregynog Hall and was attended by many distinguished foreign educationists. In 1926 Davies regarded as a personal coup the admission of Germany as a Council Member of the League of Nations at the AGM of the Federation of League of Nations Societies which he insisted should be held at Aberystwyth rather than Dresden. It was he

who personally paid the expenses of more than 100 delegates from twenty-two countries.

For the common good

An array of other interests and activities filled his every waking hour. Davies and his two sisters were the primary founders in September 1910 of the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association (the 'WNMA') set up to combat the scourge of the 'white peril' – tuberculosis – which was so rampant in Wales at the beginning of the twentieth century. He himself became the Association's first chairman, and he also chaired its finance committee. Of the £175,000 collected during the first year of its existence, the Davies family personally donated no less than £150,000. By the eve of the first world war the Association owned eighty-seven hospital beds, 148 sanatorium beds, while almost 9,000 patients had been examined during the course of 1914 alone. Its activities expanded rapidly throughout the

war years so that by 1919, when 12,660 patients were examined, there were 473 hospital beds and 594 sanatorium beds. Upon discovering that the WNMA was inadequately equipped for research, Davies and his two sisters shouldered single-handed for many years the total cost of maintaining a laboratory and paying the salary of a specialist bacteriologist.

They, too, in 1921 were responsible for endowing a Chair of Tuberculosis Research at the Welsh National School Medicine to which they donated £12,500. When Davies died in 1944 his work in establishing the WNMA was rightly applauded as 'the most outstanding of his manifold activities on behalf of the people of Wales'.¹⁵ At the same time journalist David Raymond pointed to the 'unsolved paradox' of Davies' life and career: 'He was a rich coal owner. It was a position he inherited. Most of his life-work was devoted to curing the ills partly created by the very industry from which he drew his income'.¹⁶

David Davies was well aware that the appalling death rate from tuberculosis in many Welsh counties, his native Montgomeryshire included, was largely the consequence of poverty, poor housing and living conditions, malnutrition and an ignorance of basic dietary and hygiene requirements. Consequently he set about devising schemes to improve housing conditions, initially within the Montgomeryshire towns of Llanidloes, Machynlleth and Newtown. In 1913 he and his sisters had set up the Welsh Town Planning and Housing Trust charged to design model towns and villages where housing would be monitored, and facilities for amenity and recreation made available. This progressive scheme, following swift upon the heels of the passage of the 1910 Town Planning Act, first came to fruition at Wrexham where a housing estate of 245 houses was built between 1913 and 1917. Similar enterprises followed at Barry (with a family holiday centre attached) and at Rhiwbina near Cardiff. Davies was also instrumental in devising a scheme whereby the Great Western Railway Company assumed responsibility for building and letting houses to its employees.

Parallel with David Davies' work on behalf of health care and housing in Wales must be considered the enormous contribution which he made to the educational development of the principality. His grandfather, 'Top Sawyer', had generously supported the foundation and early development (to 1886) of the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth. His father Edward had served as the college's indefatigable joint treasurer from 1891 until his death in 1898.

Shortly after his graduation from Cambridge in 1903, Davies, his step-mother and his two sisters all began to take an avid interest in the fortunes of 'the college by the sea'. In that year all four donated £2,000 to build the Edward Davies Chemical Laboratory in the town. In 1907 he endowed the college's Chair of Colonial History, in the same year accepting the vice-presidency of the college together with Sir John Williams Bart, the distinguished royal physician. From 1926 until his death he served as the President of the College, urging the beginning of a building programme on the Penglais site overlooking the town, launching an appeal fund for £300,000, and in 1935 agreeing to contribute up to £10,000 on a £ for £ basis to a fund established by the college's Old Students' Association.¹⁷ This objective was indeed achieved before Davies' death in 1944.¹⁸ Back in 1918 he had also been instrumental in ensuring the appointment of the distinguished composer (Sir) Walford Davies as Professor of Music at Aberystwyth.

Davies was also a fervent supporter of the National Library of Wales ever since its foundation in 1907, donating materials, pressing for reasonable conditions in connection with the grant of a royal charter, and serving as one of the first members of the Library's Council. In May 1927 he was elected its president, and was re-elected three times to the same position, personally welcoming the King and Queen to the formal opening of the completed library buildings in July 1937. His regular contributions to the institution's building fund were unfailingly lavish, and he ensured that the substantial archive of colliery, railway, shipping and dock records

accumulated by his grandfather 'Top Sawyer' should be deposited at the Library's Department of Manuscripts and Records.¹⁹ In May 1939 an impressive portrait of Davies in oils, the work of S. Morse Brown, was donated by his friends to the Library.²⁰

David Davies' munificence to these national institutions was made possible by the massive income which he continued to receive as chairman of the Ocean Coal Company. Yet his concern and generosity extended, too, to the coalminers employed by the company. He was instrumental during the war years in persuading his fellow-directors to inaugurate a voluntary pension scheme for the staff of the Ocean Coal Company, and he arranged for the Deep Navigation colliery to construct the first pithead baths in the whole of Wales (the second in Britain). During 1920 a company welfare officer was appointed and an Ocean Area Recreation Union formed which soon led to local associations in each of the Union's seven districts. An impressive array of initiatives and facilities followed.

Davies' other business commitments, which he invariably took seriously, included directorships of the Midland Bank and of the Great Western Railway Company. His chairmanship of Ocean Coal and of Ocean Coal and Wilsons vexed him particularly as the severe economic depression of the 1920s began to bite. As the mounting crisis in the coal industry reached crisis point during 1925–26, Davies was generally out of action, laid low by major surgery necessitated by the removal of a duodenal ulcer. Yet from his sickbed he protested vehemently against the unrelenting stand of the representatives of the Mining Association of Great Britain in their evidence before the Samuel Commission set up by Baldwin's government in 1925 to investigate the pressing problems facing the British coal industry.

His own outlook in this connection was clearly influenced by his campaign for international peace. Finally compelled to make his own representations directly to Sir Herbert Samuel as the commission's chairman, he voiced his heartfelt distaste for the 'evil spirit which appeared to vitiate and befog

every utterance of the coal-owners'.²¹ Appalled by the total lack of conciliation apparent in the evidence of the colliery owners, and convinced that the 'Triple Alliance' of colliers, railwaymen and transport workers would be called into play, Davies urged conciliation. He was adamant that the views of the coal owners in relation to the seven-hour working day in the mines were wholly mistaken, and urged recourse to the International Labour Office to solve the dispute.²² He believed passionately that an independent tribunal should be established to arbitrate the disputes which arose in the coal trade, but his advanced views were disregarded as events moved inexorably towards the general strike of May 1926 and the subsequent long lock-out in the coal industry.

Out of politics

It was the very same sequence of events which led to David Davies' final severance with Lloyd George and his resignation as the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire. As already noted, the two men had parted company back in 1917. In the 'Coupon' general election of December 1918 Davies was yet again returned unopposed to Westminster, having, it would seem, been offered the infamous 'coupon' as an indication of favour from the coalition government machine and having publicly repudiated it, dismissing the gesture as 'an unsolicited testimonial, I assure you. I never asked for it... A great many people are beginning to protest against the kind of labelling which is going on at present'.²³

During the lifetime of the post-war coalition government he rarely appeared at Westminster, and, when he did surface, was generally to be found in the opposition lobby: 'I support the Coalition when it proposes measures based on Liberal principles', he wrote.²⁴ Describing the coalition as 'this new order of shameless opportunists', he was notably venomous in his personal attacks on Lloyd George who, he asserted, was fully prepared to 'sacrifice nearly all our principles in order that certain statesmen might remain in office'.²⁵ A fervent advocate of reunion between the two Liberal camps

(Asquithian and Lloyd Georgeite), Davies was vehemently opposed to the suggestion that the Coalition Liberals might consider 'fusion' with Bonar Law's Conservatives. Parliament, he thundered, had become 'simply a registering machine for the decrees of the Cabinet', 'practical government' having become the preserve 'of the chosen few'. Indeed, in his view, the Prime Minister had 'well-nigh become an absolute dictator'.²⁶

He railed consistently against what he regarded as the government's excessive public expenditure, and was one of only three Liberal MPs from Wales to vote against the Temporalities Bill to disendow the Welsh Church. Only over the Irish settlement of 1921 did Davies applaud Lloyd George's achievement – 'He has gone off the rails in the past, but he is on the right track now and his greatest war achievements have been entirely eclipsed in this latest triumph'.²⁷ This sense of admiration and respect, however, proved notably short-lived as Davies returned to assailing the Prime Minister as the term of office of the coalition government drew to its close.

In both the general elections of November 1922 and December 1923 David Davies was returned to parliament unopposed. Within Montgomeryshire, such was his personal popularity and prestige that he was considered 'unassailable', 'the premier of Wales when the time comes',²⁸ and local interest focused simply on 'the brand of Liberalism Col. Davies will adopt'.²⁹

At times he himself doubted whether he should continue to sit at Westminster. Fully absorbed by his abiding commitment to the work of the League of Nations and by an array of philanthropic initiatives to improve the lot of his fellow Welshmen, on more than one occasion he asked pointedly, 'Is it right that I should endeavour to represent the County in parliament when obviously so much of my time has to be devoted to other work?'³⁰ His appearances at Westminster were few and fleeting, while his constituency engagements had dwindled to almost nothing.

No contested parliamentary election had taken place in Montgomeryshire

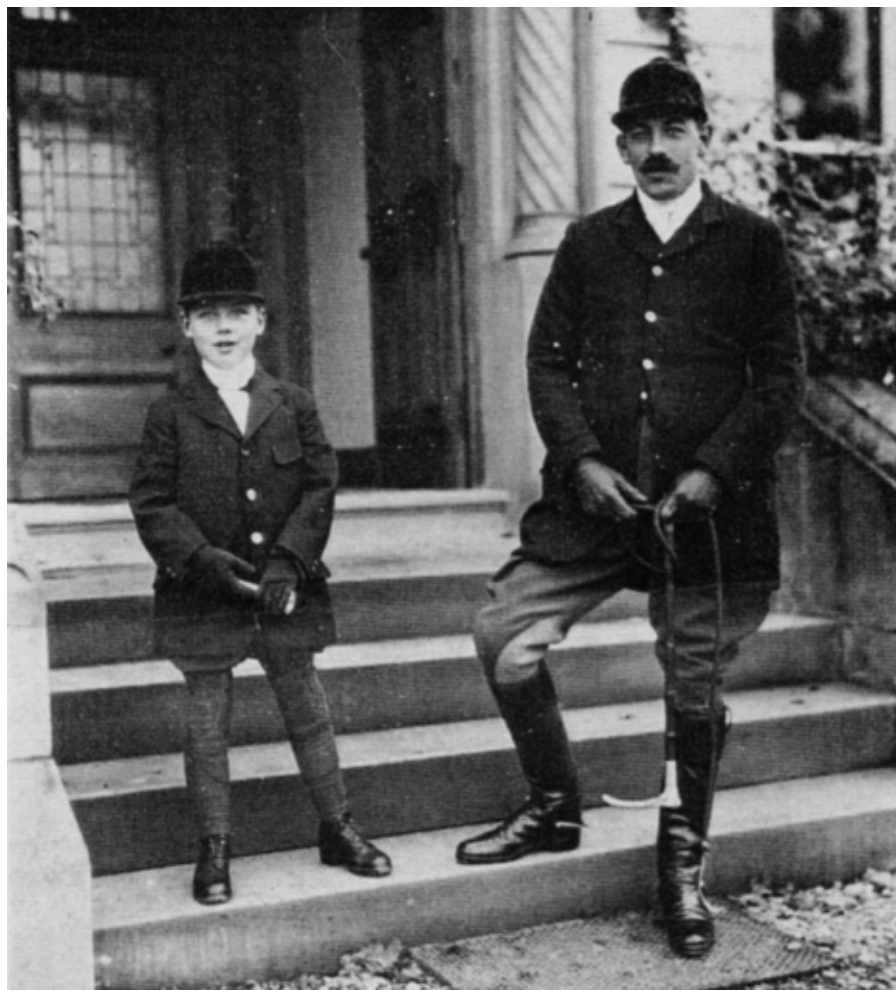
since 1906. Yet the circumstances of the 1923 poll – a superficial reunion of the two wings of the Liberal Party in defence of free trade – appealed greatly to Davies when he addressed election meetings in support of a number of Liberal candidates in Wales. In 1924 he easily repelled the challenge of a pioneering Socialist aspirant, Arthur Davies. At this juncture it seemed that David Davies might well feel predisposed to continue as Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire, but events soon took a dramatically different turn.

Davies had always looked askance at Lloyd George's accumulation of a private 'Political Fund', which he had built up between 1918 and 1922, allegedly by selling political honours and distinctions. From the spring of 1924 onwards the former Prime Minister had made lavish use of his 'Fund' to finance a number of autonomous policy committees to investigate the economic ills of the nation and attempt to evolve radical policies for their remedy. Their findings were then pub-

lished in a succession of detailed reports, among them *Coal and Power* (1924), *The Land and the Nation* (the 'Green Book') (1925) and *Towns and the Land* (the 'Brown Book') (1925).

Of these by far the most contentious were the proposals of *The Land and the Nation* which proposed that British agriculture might be developed through the adoption of a scheme for the state purchase of agricultural land which would then be leased to working farmers under strict supervision at fixed rentals. These proposals came close to advocating the nationalisation of rural land and immediately enraged many prominent Liberals. Among them was David Davies who became even more incensed at the renewed fissure in the ranks of the Liberal Party caused by its reactions to the general strike in May 1926, and who intimated his intention to resign as MP for Montgomeryshire. Although the original 'Green Book' proposals were soon substantially modified, and repeated pleas were made to Davies to reconsider, he reiterated his

David Davies and his son, Mike, about 1922



intention to stand down as, in his view, the Liberals had become 'a party whose policy is no longer based on Liberal principles, whose Parliamentary leader is no longer to be trusted, and whose organisation is no longer inspired by the true spirit of Liberalism'.³¹

Again local Liberals begged Davies to review his position. 'Personally I don't want to stand again as I am sick of politics', he confided to Sir Donald Maclean, 'If the party is going to be bribed by Lloyd George we may as well shut up shop, at any rate for the present'.³² Richard Jones, the chairman of the Montgomeryshire Liberals, genuinely feared that the seat might be lost to the Conservatives at the next general election if another Liberal candidate stood:

I would not like to be a party to the rejection of so admirable a man. With a great name – famous traditions – rich personal qualities – and a good Liberal to boot, he would prove a tower of strength in the keen fight that is facing us. The Liberal Party in the county should make everything subservient to the prime consideration of retaining the seat.³³

Davies was adamant, and local Liberals were compelled to choose a new parliamentary candidate, a process in which Davies intervened by attempting to ensure that the nomination went to his own personal nominee W. Alford Jehu of Llanfair Caereinion. In this unworthy objective his ambition was thwarted as the choice fell on E. Clement Davies, 'by an overwhelming majority', and it was he who was duly elected to parliament on 30 May 1929. David Davies, although chosen president of the Montgomeryshire Liberals, generally remained conspicuously aloof from his successor's first election campaign.

International affairs

Predictably, following his retirement as an MP, David Davies devoted much of his time to international affairs. Convinced that the Covenant of the League of Nations was incapable of preventing the recurrence of war, he came to advocate the setting up of both an impartial tribunal to settle international disputes and an international police force to en-

force its decisions. His proposals, however, were widely rejected out-of-hand as visionary and impracticable. Davies' response was to write and publish the massive tome *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (1930), an attractive work with an array of appendices which was generally well received by the critics. Sales, however, were sluggish; most copies were despatched as gifts by the author. Throughout 1931 the domestic economy and international relations rapidly deteriorated, provoking Davies to declare, 'We are prepared to die for our country, but God forbid we should ever be willing to think for it'.³⁴

Somewhat dejected by the conduct of the League of Nations Union, in 1932 David Davies turned to a new body, the New Commonwealth Society. Now created the first Baron Davies of Llandinam by Ramsay MacDonald, he looked askance at Japanese aggression in Manchuria and at what he regarded as the spineless acquiescence of the British foreign secretary Sir John Simon. June 1934 saw the publication of a second important work from his pen, *Force*, which virulently attacked the relative impotence of the League of Nations and again pressed for an International Tribunal and Police Force. During the same year he donated the sum of £60,000 to finance the building of the Temple of Peace which still adorns Cathays Park, Cardiff to this day.

Lord Davies' energy and enthusiasm for the causes in which he believed so passionately knew no bounds. He campaigned tirelessly to increase the membership of the New Commonwealth Society (year after year he wrote off its debts) and he addressed his fellow peers regularly on the need for an international tribunal and police force. When in June 1935 the League of Nations Union organised the National Peace Ballot, the extent of Lord Davies' influence in Wales became immediately apparent as the twelve highest returns in the whole of the United Kingdom were recorded in Welsh counties. Montgomeryshire, with a turnout of 86.6 per cent, was the highest of them all.

The same year saw the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Lord Davies and Winston Churchill were generally lone

voices protesting against the failure to impose sanctions against Italy. During the years leading up to the outbreak of the second world war, Lord Davies was an imposing voice, notably in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian*, the letters page of *The Times*, and the House of Lords, as German rearmament gathered momentum and Czecho-Slovakia was invaded. A public speech in London in May 1937 summed up the kernel of his philosophy: 'Our purpose is to make force the servant of right'.³⁵

It was noted in the press that he had lent support to Labour candidates in recent by-elections,³⁶ and, amidst avid speculation that a general election might well be imminent, it was rumoured in the Welsh press that Lord Davies' son, the Hon. Michael Davies, was likely to stand as an independent Liberal in Montgomeryshire against Clement Davies.³⁷ Although Lord Davies at once dismissed the press conjecture as 'pure gossip and invention', he implored Clement Davies, a member of the Simonite Liberal group in the Commons ever since 1931, to return to the mainstream party fold:

We shall never emerge from this torpor until the Liberal and Progressive flag is once more unfurled ... So will you allow me once more, as a Hen Liberal ['old Liberal'], to plead with you most earnestly and sincerely to join the ranks of the Independent Liberals in the House of Commons?³⁸

By this time Lord Davies had become totally convinced of the need to form a 'United Front' of all progressive forces in British political life as a base to fight against the appeasement policies of the Chamberlain government. In November he had appealed to Sir Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to condemn appeasement as 'the very antithesis of any policy based on League principles and the system of collective security', imploring him, 'Why not declare war openly against the existing regime, and join with others in creating a United Front of all the progressive parties in our country?'³⁹ During 1938 he had twice travelled to the USA in the cause of peace.

When war followed in September 1939, Lord Davies occupied himself fully with drafting lengthy memoranda on national policy for the war effort.

He began to formulate plans for a federation of free countries in Europe after the end of hostilities. He was moved to action above all by the Russian assault on Finland in November and began to set in motion a Finnish Aid Committee and Bureau, even visiting Helsinki. The ultimate defeat of Finland vexed him enormously.

Later campaigns involved the evacuation of children, a defence of the reservoirs serving the great cities, and a movement to reform the procedures of the House of Lords. Subsequently Lord Davies began to campaign for a Supreme War Council. The war years saw the publication of a number of volumes penned by him, among them *Federated Europe* (1940), *The Foundations of Victory* (1941) and *The Seven Pillars of Peace* (1943). By this time he had himself fallen victim to cancer of the spine and he died at Llandinam on 16 June 1944. Three months later his eldest son Mike was killed in action with the Sixth Royal Welch Fusiliers on the borders of Holland.

In 1910 David Davies had married Amy, the fourth daughter of L. T. Penman of Broadwood Park, Lanchester. There were two children of the marriage, a son David (always known as Mike), who briefly became the second Lord Davies in 1944, and Margarite, who died at school at the age of eighteen. The 1910 honeymoon had been spent big game hunting in Africa where it is thought that Amy contracted a rare tropical disease from which she eventually died in 1918 following years of ill-health.

In 1922 Davies married Henrietta Margaret (Rita) (died 1948), daughter of James Grant Fergusson of Baledmund, Pitlochry, Perthshire. Rita proved to be an extraordinarily devoted partner, fully in tune with her husband's philanthropic impulses, notably those related to health. There were to be four children of the second marriage – Mary, Edward, Islwyn and Jean. The present (third) Lord Davies, born in 1940, is the son of the second baron, and still resides at Plas Dinam, Llandinam, Montgomeryshire.

The National Library of Wales has a bust by Sir W. Goscombe John and the portrait by Murray Urquhart, while the

famous portrait by S. Morse Brown is by now in the custody of the National Museum. A further portrait by Augustus John is at Berthddu, Llandinam. A large archive of Lord Davies' papers, many relating to the organisation of the New Commonwealth Society, has been deposited at the National Library. His biography remains unwritten.

David, Lord Davies, was undoubtedly the public-spirited Welshman of his age, blessed with an exceptionally retentive memory and an ability to take a distant view of events. But he did tend to rely on his wealth to achieve results, and he was reluctant to concede that short cuts were not always available to achieve his cherished goals. Consequently he could be imperious and impatient at times, described by Sir Wynn Wheldon as 'notable for kindness and terribleness' (a phrase originally used by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to describe an acquaintance).⁴⁰

In his most important book *The Problem of the Twentieth Century* (1930), he summed up the crux of his belief in international co-operation:

We shall never get real prosperity and security until we get peace; we shall never get peace until we get justice, and we shall get none of these things until we succeed in establishing the rule of law by means of the creation of a really effective international authority equipped with those two vital institutions, an equity tribunal and an international peace force.

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- 3 Lewis, op. cit., p. 21.
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- 5 *South Wales Daily News*, 5 and 15 December 1905; *Montgomeryshire Express*, 5 January 1906; *Montgomery County Times*, 9 January 1906.

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- 10 Joseph Davies, *The Prime Minister's Secretariat, 1916–1920* (Newport, 1951), p. 56.
- 11 House of Lords Record Office, Lloyd George Papers F/83/10/5, Davies to Lloyd George, 27 May 1917.
- 12 Ibid. F/83/10/7, Davies to Lloyd George, 23 June 1917.
- 13 Ibid. F/83/10/8, Lloyd George to Davies, 24 June 1917.
- 14 Davies' work in this connection is noted in Goronwy J. Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace* (Cardiff, 1969).
- 15 *The Times*, 17 June 1944, p. 6, cols. f–g.
- 16 *Reynolds News*, 18 June 1944.
- 17 *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 23 April 1935.
- 18 *The Times*, 17 June 1944.
- 19 NLW, Llandinam Papers.
- 20 See the fulsome tribute by the NLW Librarian Sir William Llewellyn Davies published in the *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 20 June 1944.
- 21 Cited in Lewis, op. cit., pp. 34–35.
- 22 Davies argued that the coal owners should have concentrated their efforts on proving that the British coal industry was the victim of unfair competition from the continental coalfields where eight- or even nine-hour working days were the norm. See David Davies, 'The coal position in South Wales', *Welsh Outlook*, October 1929, pp. 38ff, where Davies argues powerfully that the Italian market had been lost to Welsh mines mainly because of the demand for German 'reparations' which would be paid in coal as imposed by the victorious allies from 1920 onwards. Germany supplied the bulk of the raw materials which fuelled the dramatic rise in Italian industrial production after the war.
- 23 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 3 December 1918.
- 24 Ibid., 3 February 1920.
- 25 *The Times*, 26 March 1920.
- 26 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 30 September 1919.
- 27 NLW, Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers (uncatalogued), Davies to Thomas Jones, 7 December 1921.
- 28 *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 23 October 1922; *South Wales News*, 1 November 1922.
- 29 *Montgomery County Times*, 28 October 1922.
- 30 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 23 October 1923.
- 31 NLW, Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers, Davies to Richard Jones, 15 November 1926 (copy).
- 32 Ibid., Davies to Maclean, 7 December 1926 (copy).
- 33 Ibid., Jones to T. Hughes Jones, 27 February 1927.
- 34 Cited in Lewis, op. cit., p. 38.
- 35 *Montgomeryshire Express*, 29 May 1937.
- 36 *Western Mail*, 3 December 1938.
- 37 Ibid., 17 December 1938.
- 38 NLW, Clement Davies Papers 11/3, Lord Davies to Clement Davies, 19 December 1938.
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Reports

Liberalism in North America

Fringe meeting, September 2000, with Dilys Hill,
Terry McDonald and Akaash Maharaj
Report by **Jen Tankard**

Yet again at a Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting there was standing room only. The chosen topic for this meeting (borrowing a phrase from Tom Paine), “‘The Fruits of the Liberty Tree’: Liberalism in North America’, was timed to highlight the role of liberalism in northern America in the run up to the US presidential elections. Chaired by Lord Wallace of Saltaire, the speakers were Professor Dilys Hill from the University of Southampton, Terry McDonald from the Southampton Institute and Akaash Maharaj, National Policy Chair of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Dilys Hill focused on the tradition of liberty in the USA, starting with a reminder of the Jeffersonian concept of liberty and how it combined with elements of classical liberalism. This resulted in an interpretation of liberalism, from the eighteenth century onwards, which placed equal emphasis on the importance of the marketplace and that of representative government.

Hill also briefly mentioned the need to understand US liberalism in the context of achieving a balance between libertarianism and liberation. This balancing act is essentially between the wish to achieve libertarian, minimalist government while liberating citizens from ethnic and gender discrimination and finding structures to tackle inequality.

The ascendancy of capitalism in the nineteenth century, which coincided with urbanisation and industrialisation, was countered by reform liberalism towards the end of the nineteenth and

early twentieth century. According to Hill, ‘Reform liberalism brings together ideas from populism, progressivism and even socialism. It was and remains the synthesis of many strands in American politics.’

Hill saw reform liberalism reaching its apogee in FDR’s ‘New Deal’ and Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ programmes of the 1960s. These programmes promoted positive liberty through social reform programmes implemented by the government. At the same time, America became the conscious leader of the free world, and Hill commented that ‘America is a nation obsessed with liberty... the idea of liberty is central to American culture’.

However, Hill acknowledged the shortcomings of American liberalism but believed that ‘while it can be claimed that American liberty has a positive existence, it also takes a certain fixed form. Newcomers pass freely into the mainstream, but at the same time there are demands that they conform to an orthodoxy that restricts their freedom to a set of social expectations. Nevertheless, in spite of imperfections, the ideal is still promoted as America’s public philosophy and America’s intentions and objectives remain dedicated to the preservation and enlargement of freedom. Liberty continues to be the ideal by which America characterises itself and projects itself to the outside world’.

Hill explained how this dominance of ideology came under attack from the 1970s onwards. This was partly as a response to the failure of Nixon’s

Family Assisted Plan and then in the 1980s because of economic downturn, a new conservatism and a backlash against the 1960s. This resulted in a conservative renaissance that successfully labelled liberalism as a dirty word. Her conclusion was that despite the Clinton years, liberalism has yet to recover its position in influencing American politics and philosophy.

Terry McDonald had a cheerier story to tell. The Liberals in Canada have dominated the political scene for the last hundred years and, by the 1930s, had come to be regarded as the natural party of government. Given the similarities of the political systems in Canada and the UK, it is not surprising that, in both countries, national politics has been dominated by two parties.

McDonald noted that: ‘Unlike Britain, where the Tories have survived and (usually) flourished, and the Liberals have found themselves challenged and replaced as the party of government by Labour, in Canada it is the Liberal Party that has not only survived into the 21st century but has undoubtedly become the “natural party of government”’. Interestingly, in Canada, while the Conservatives are referred to as Tories, the Liberals are referred to as Grits, derived from the term ‘men of clear grit, or determination, and whose commitment to democracy was uncompromising’.

So why have the Canadian Liberals been so successful? McDonald put it down to two key factors. The Liberals have always managed to remain at the centre of national politics, adjusting their ideology to match prevailing views. The party has swung from Keynesianism in the 1950s and 1960s to ‘business liberalism’ in the 1990s.

McDonald also commented that Liberals have also been the party that ‘most clearly articulated the ways in which national unity could be maintained. They were... the party that saw provincial rights as an essential element in maintaining this unity.’ In fact McDonald believed that ‘If there is one consistent strand to the attitudes and actions of Liberal governments it is their belief that Canada is indeed a confederation, a pact between two

founding nations'. McDonald concluded that the real threat to the rule of the Canadian Liberal Party was complacency from within rather than strong opposition from without. But should the party be defeated at the next national election, McDonald felt sure that the Liberals would once more be able to rally round and bounce back into power.

The LDHG was very lucky to have, as the final speaker, Akaash Maharaj from Canada. Over to observe our conference on his party's behalf, he spoke about contemporary liberalism in Canada. Maharaj believed that 'the next twelve months will inevitably come to be seen as the decisive moment for Canadian liberalism and for the very destiny of national enterprise'.

Maharaj is rightly proud of the Liberal record of success in office. On taking office in 1993, the Liberals faced high unemployment, accumulated debt levels, spending deficits and a reputation as 'a snowy third world state'. Over seven years, the Liberals had turned a deficit into surplus, cut taxes, reduced unemployment, held inflation levels down and been rated in the United Nations Human Development Index as the best place in the world to live. Yet despite this track record, Maharaj believed the Liberals faced a real threat at the next national election.

Unlike McDonald, he did not see the threat to liberalism as coming from internal strains. Rather that, as the traditional main opposition party – the Progressive Conservatives – collapses into disarray it is being replaced by the Bloc Québécois, which would destroy Canada through separatism, and the Reform Party, which would herald a new era of right-wing bigotry for Canada.

It was hoped that the Liberal Party would see off this threat – not only because of its track record in delivering economic prosperity and unity to the country but also because, as Maharaj believed, 'Our success has flowed entirely out of the fact that Canadians are, on the whole, an enlightened and therefore liberal people. As long as we [the Liberals] have stayed true to liberal

values, and have served as a mirror in which Canadians could see reflected back their better natures, victory has been Canada's'.

All three speakers raised interesting parallels between the history of liberalism in the UK and in North-eastern America. What students of history should consider is whether there are lessons to learn from the Canadian experience which could help to consolidate and boost the UK Liberal Democrats' current rise

in representation at national, regional and local levels.

Note: as readers of the Journal will no doubt be aware, the Canadian federal election took place on 27 November. Liberal leader Jean Chretien became the first Canadian prime minister since 1945 to win a third successive election victory. The full result was: Liberals 173; Canadian Alliance (previously Reform) 66; Bloc Québécois 37; NDP 13; Progressive Conservatives 12.

Letters to the Editor

David Rebak

I have just read with great interest issue 28 of the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, and in particular John Meadowcroft's article on 'The Origins of Community Politics'.

I don't wish to lessen the credit due to Young Liberals and the Union of Liberal Students, nor to minimise in any way the tremendous importance and value of the job they did. However, the article doesn't acknowledge the absolutely critical work and example given by a number of leading Liberals of the 1960s.

In May 1965 I stood as a Liberal council candidate for the first time. I was naive, innocent and willing to allow the election to be run by 'those who were supposed to know it all' because they had been doing it for years. I personally canvassed 75 per cent of the ward and I doubled the Liberal vote and came second. Nevertheless I considered the election campaign a fiasco and was sure there was a better way.

In the autumn of 1965 I attended my first Liberal assembly at Scarborough and had the opportunity to meet

Southend Cllr David Evans, Liverpool Cllr Cyril Carr and Richmond Cllr Dr Stanley Rundle. Incidentally, it was Rundle who, at that conference, first coined the phrase later to be made even more famous by David Penhaligon: 'If you've got something to say to the electorate, stick it on a piece of paper and shove it through their letterboxes'.

In the early 1960s, David Evans, Stanley Rundle and Cyril Carr had been elected by carrying out a policy of 'community politics' long before the term had been coined. If I remember correctly, it was at that conference that the first moves were made to set up the Association of Liberal Councilors, which I was glad to join. Some short time later our first whole day of seminars was at Leamington Spa.

At the 1965 Assembly, Russell Johnston, who had just been elected to the House of Commons, gave a fringe meeting talk advising aspiring councilors and MPs how it was done. It was common sense and electrifying. I, and many others, was inspired to go out and practice what was later to be called community politics.

Graem Peters

I enjoyed reading Peter Joyce's article on the Popular Front of the late 1930s (*Journal* 28, Autumn 2000) and its failure to see Liberals and Labour nation-wide working together, politically and electorally. His analysis does not adequately explain why the Popular Front amounted to nothing.

The PF was always intended to be, first and foremost, an electoral challenge to the National Government. For the PF to be treated seriously by either Liberals or Labour, it needed to be seen to be successful in winning votes and seats in by-elections. The relative weakness of the Liberal Party at the time meant that it had very few candidates to withdraw to assist Labour in winning seats. What candidates it could muster were unlikely to gather many votes regardless of where they came from.

The Liberal Party was, frankly, an electoral joke in the 1935 Parliament. A total of eight Liberal vacancies occurred between 1935 and 1940 (when electoral hostilities ceased). In six of these constituencies, the local Liberal Association failed to select a Liberal candidate. Only in two, North Cornwall (1939) and St Ives (1937) did the local Liberals choose a Liberal candidate. Even then, with Labour choosing not to field a candidate in St Ives, the Liberals still failed to win.

Labour also stood down to allow the Liberals a straight fight with the Tories in Bewdley, Chertsey, North Dorset and Aberdeenshire West. In each case, the Liberals failed to capitalise. Over the same period, Labour was managing to gain twelve seats and to hold all its own seats in the bargain.

Peter Joyce criticises Labour's attitude to supporting PF candidates. He misleads, however, with regard to Chertsey, where the 'progressive' candidate, E. R. Haylor, had stood as a Liberal candidate at the preceding three general elections.

The whole situation is best summed up by the plight of the highly rated Arthur Irvine, the Liberal candidate in the Aberdeenshire West by-election. Having come close to winning the seat in 1935 and 1939, he gave up on the

Liberals and went off and joined Labour, who managed to get him into Parliament in 1947.

It is hard to criticise Labour for not taking the PF seriously when the Liberals as a party were incapable of bringing anything of real value to its cause.

Dr Michael Brock

May I ask for the freedom of your columns to dispute some statements about Grey and Asquith in Peter Truesdale's review of John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation* (*Journal* 28, Autumn 2000)?

Did 'Asquith and Grey... outmanoeuvre the peace party within the cabinet' in July–August 1914? It was agreed, at the first cabinet meeting on Sunday 2 August, to tell the French that the German fleet would not be allowed to enter the Channel and bombard their coast. At the second there was a decision 'to take action' in case of 'a substantial violation' of Belgian neutrality (no attempts being made 'to state a formula' by defining either 'substantial' or the nature of the intended 'action'). Grey recorded after the war that the Channel pledge was 'suggested originally by an anti-war member of the cabinet' (British Library Add. MSS 46, 386, fos. 81–82; see also fos. 64, 75, 77; *Twenty-Five Years*, ii. 2). It had no war-like effect: the Germans' plans did not include using their fleet in this way (nor would it have been feasible to do so, since it was a short-range fleet).

As to the pledge on Belgium, maintaining the neutrality of that country had long been a great objective for Little Englander Liberals. In 1910 Grey was criticised in the *Nation* for regarding the 1839 Treaty as less important than the balance of power. 'We could not imagine', H. W. Massingham wrote, 'Sir Edward Grey following Lord Granville in risking war in defence of the integrity of Belgium against a Franco-Prussian encroachment' (*Nation*, 18 June 1910).

'A substantial violation' of Belgian neutrality meant, in substance, a violation which would cause the Belgian government to call on the

guarantor powers for more than diplomatic help. The second cabinet broke up before news of the German ultimatum to Belgium reached London. The pledge on Belgium was thus given when the German incursion into Belgium was expected (in London, as in Brussels) to be confined to the Ardennes, south and east of the Sambre–Meuse line. The evidence that, if it had been so confined, the guarantors would not have been asked for military aid is very strong (J. E. Helmreich, *Journal of Modern History* 36 (1964), 425). The cabinet, Asquith wrote to Bonar Law on 2 August, 'do not contemplate ... and are satisfied that no good object would be served by the immediate despatch of an expeditionary force' to the Continent.

By 4 August, with the German ultimatum to Brussels, the Belgian appeal for help, and the prospect of an assault on Liège, everything had changed. Harold Begbie wrote in 1920 that it was mistaken to talk of Asquith having 'brought England into the war. England carried Mr Asquith into the war ... A House of Commons that had hesitated an hour after the invasion of Belgium would have been swept out of existence by the wrath and indignation of the people' (*The Mirrors of Downing Street*, popular edition, 1922, 43–44).

The most articulate spokesman for the peace party did not behave as someone who had been 'outmanoeuvred'. Massingham wrote to Margot Asquith on 11 August: the Government's White Paper 'completely changed my views. Sir Edward Grey's case seems to me unbreakable at every point'. R. C. K. Ensor, the chief leader-writer in 1914 for the Liberal *Daily Chronicle*, wrote years later about the German invasion of Belgium: 'For years past the Liberals ... had been making it an article of party faith that militarist Germany was not as black as it was painted. Now in a flash it seemed to them self-revealed as much blacker'. Can Grey be said to have 'painted Britain into a corner' when the treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality had been signed twenty-three years before he was born?

Reviews

250 High Streets later...

Mark D'Arcy & Rory Maclean: *Nightmare! The Race to Become London's Mayor*
(Politico's Publishing, 2000; 287pp.)

Reviewed by **Susan Kramer**

Nightmare, the story of the London mayoral election, had no sooner been published than kind friends began to send me copies in the post. I tried to share one with Flick Rea, keeper of my campaign diary, protector of my time and raiser of my spirits on the inevitable days when everything in the campaign went wrong. 'I don't need a copy', she said 'I was there'.

Flick has a point and it is very relevant to this book. *Nightmare* is a blow-by-blow account, gripping in a rather breathless way, of one of the strangest elections in British history. But it is not a work of political analysis. The characters – and what a collection they were, from Archer to Livingstone – charge on and off the page. The real question that I want answered though, is how Labour, who by rights should easily romp home in any election in the capital, managed to let a prize like Mayor of London slip through their fingers? How did the Labour leadership become so arrogant? What fuelled its control-freak tendencies and its resistance to the spirit of devolution? How did Millbank so badly misunderstand the Livingstone appeal? With those questions unanswered, the story of the Mayoral election remains a series of chaotic, almost random events, which is how it often felt to me when I was in the middle of it.

Many days on the campaign trail were simply surreal. I have vivid memories of sitting in Hammersmith bus station, late on a Saturday, doing interviews on the mobile phone as the *News of the World* collapsed Jeffrey Archer's candidacy. I wondered then –

and I still do – if the timing of his fall, so early in the campaign, was triggered by a surge of conscience in Ted Francis who had allegedly lied for him, or by the Tory hierarchy deciding that he was too great a risk and had to go. Tory crises always seemed to come just when we thought the day was over. When Norris was 'in' then 'out' then 'in' again in the second Tory selection, I did the interviews on a cramped phone on the back counter of a dimly lit cafe near Elstree.

Labour's crises were a little more predictable. But none of us anticipated the Labour short-listing when Livingstone was 'off' one day and 'on' the next. The tensions between the Labour candidates were palpable at husting after husting during their pre-selection period. It seemed to me that only Glenda Jackson came out of it with real dignity. My admiration for her grew as she resisted pressures and I am sure all kinds of advantageous offers to leave the mayoral race. On the day when the press rumours flew that she was dropping out, we crossed paths close to the Millbank studios. When she said 'See you tomorrow', I knew that she was going to stick it out. Glenda always said that on principle she felt there must be a woman in the Labour mayoral line-up.

As a Liberal Democrat candidate, and one that started the campaign as an unknown, you make your chances when you can. The definitive moment came for me on *Question Time* after Dobson had been selected by Labour and when Livingstone was dithering over running as an independent. We

knew there would be a huge audience once both agreed to appear and the BBC trailed it heavily. The mood beforehand was vile, with my support team (my husband and son) and Norris' minders finding themselves in a virtual demilitarised zone between the Dobson and Livingstone camps. Dobson, I am convinced, had absolutely believed Livingstone when he said that he would support the decision of the Labour selection process and could not conceive of a man of honour going back on his word. I knew that I was with them on the *Question Time* panel on sufferance. But that also gave me the advantage of surprise. I came out fighting with strikes against all three opponents, Livingstone, Dobson and Norris. From that point on we finally began to get serious treatment from the press and no-one ever asked again 'are you tough enough?' which had always been the refrain from Michael White of the *Guardian*.

The question remains: could I have beaten Dobson and Norris to end up in the final two with Livingstone, where we might have dislodged him on the basis of second preferences and won? Certainly I could have beaten Dobson; we were only some twenty thousand votes short. The reason that we did not was simply the Romsey by-election. In early March we received word that central resources and manpower that might have come to the London campaign would go to Romsey. Key activists, including many from London, switched their efforts to Sandra Gidley's campaign. It was absolutely the right thing to do and my team resoundingly cheered her success on election night.

Beating Norris would have taken much more although until the closing days we were never more than a few percentage points behind. The difficulties began with the delays in the Tory and especially the Labour selection. Instead of a full line-up of candidates by mid-December, which would have given us a five-month crack at getting decent press coverage, we did not seriously get press until Livingstone announced as an independent in February. As always in Liberal Democrat campaigns, we lacked the financial



resources to advertise and get around the press focus on the other parties and their scandals. At the end of the campaign, the May Day riots, with no effort on the Tories' part, had the effect of pushing anti-Livingstone votes into the Norris camp on an implied 'law and order' association. I believe that those events finally settled the outcome of the election.

If there was one surprise above others in the mayoral campaign, it was the emergence of a London political identity. When I began on the campaign trail in August, the hustings showed candidates to be all over the place, both in defining the problems and the solutions. Candidates behaved pretty true to party. By May, the core manifestos looked amazingly similar and indeed quite clearly recognisable to anyone following the policies of the London Region Liberal Democrats as far back as 1997. The pressure of the hustings, sometimes three or four a day, had forced common sense and convergence and in terms of the policy debate it was a clear Liberal Democrat win. A strange bonding also developed among the candidates, with the possible exception of Dobson. No-one was naive, but it must have been close to the sense of shared suffering experienced by hostages. Certainly we could give each other's set speeches and Norris to this day claims that he once gave mine and I his.

I loved every minute of the nine months of the mayoral campaign. I was blessed with a small but amazing team, from Ashley Lumsden, who was born to be a campaign manager, to Charlotte Barraclough, who had never done media until she abandoned a round-the-world trip to run my press operation. My son Jonathan dropped out of university (temporarily) to be my minder, and student interns became the backbone of our operations. Brian Orrell and the London Region Liberal Democrats, MPs and peers led by Ed Davey and Conrad Russell, were stalwarts. The Assembly candidates were dedicated and we owe a lot to those who flogged their guts out knowing that they themselves would not win. We used the campaign to build a London-wide awareness of Liberal Democrats and our policies. Local parties turned out across the capital and we did indeed cover every one of its 250 high streets. Many Londoners used their

vote, even if a second preference, to support a Liberal Democrat for the first time. We won four seats in the Greater London Assembly and because of the calibre of our candidates they are influencing events well beyond their numbers, effectively holding the balance of power.

There will never be an election like this again. Next time it will be a short campaign with limited appearances, more conventional and, I suspect, less filled with surprises. Livingstone will try to remain Mayor until he is carried out feet first. Norris and I will almost certainly both run again. I doubt that next time anyone will bother to write a book about the campaign.

But as the events of last year fade in the memory, I confess I am glad *Nightmare* was written, to remind me that it really did happen and was not just a dream.

Susan Kramer was the Liberal Democrat candidate in the first London mayoral race.

New leader, new book

Charles Kennedy: *The Future of Politics*
(HarperCollins, 2000; 255pp.)

Reviewed by Duncan Brack

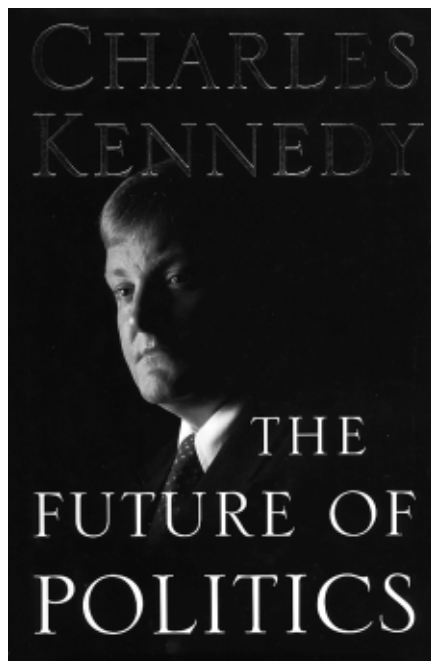
How times change. Paddy Ashdown had to struggle to find a publisher for his first book as leader, *Citizen's Britain*. Twelve years later, Charles Kennedy's first book is produced by a mainstream publisher in glossy hardback – tribute, of course, to the strength and relevance of the party that Ashdown built and Kennedy inherited.

Yet the purpose of these two books was and is rather different. *Citizen's Britain* was a (reasonably successful) attempt to put the third party, at the time disappearing in the opinion polls to within the statistical margin of error of zero, and its leader, on the policy map – to reassert the Liberal strength as a party of imagination and invention. It

was full of ideas, some half-baked, many sensible, some already party policy, some not. In policy terms (though not in strategy), it described an agenda which Ashdown stuck to, pretty much, for the following ten years of his leadership.

The Future of Politics does not need to establish the party in the public mind. It is aimed instead to define Kennedy as a man with a policy prospectus, something which neither his own background as TV light entertainment's favourite politician, nor his uninspiring leadership campaign, managed to do. Does it succeed? Yes and no.

Unlike *Citizen's Britain*, it contains almost no *new* ideas. It is an explanation, mostly coherent and lucid, of the



party's *existing* policy position; indeed, those of us more familiar than we would like to be with party policy papers will recognise many proposals and even, on occasion, entire paragraphs lifted verbatim from other sources. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this – after all, it would be rather alarming to find that your new leader didn't go along with the vast bulk of party policy – but it would be nice to find the occasional new idea. The only one I could spot in the entire book was a commitment to all-women shortlists and 'zipping' for parliamentary selections, a position which I was certainly not aware Kennedy held, and one that it would be quite nice seeing him do something about. There are also, unfortunately, too many mistakes – carbon monoxide, for example, is not the main global greenhouse gas (it's carbon dioxide, an entirely different substance), and the UK's target under the Kyoto Protocol is a 12.5% reduction in greenhouse emissions, not 5.2%. The logic is not always coherent, for example over fuel taxes, a point picked up when the launch of the book coincided with the first wave of fuel tax protests; and overall the book has not been well edited.

But on the other hand... no-one expected Kennedy to be an ideas man, and there are other qualities which party leaders can display. Kennedy's great strength lies in his ability to

communicate a message, and what this book does is to put over the Liberal Democrat agenda in a well-written and accessible way. The policy proposals are interspersed with personal anecdotes and reminiscences which make them enjoyable to read, and Kennedy's turn of phrase is occasionally brilliant (as in 'the political map is like a water bed – apply pressure in one area and you will get a reaction somewhere else'). Some sections – particularly the case for the Euro – are excellent.

My favourite part of all is the opening paragraphs of the conclusion, where Kennedy lists the four things he has got most seriously wrong since entering parliament in 1983 (for your information: not opposing the establishment of the Child Support Agency; trying to minimise attention to the conference vote in favour of a Royal Commission on the reform of drugs

law in 1994 (not 1992, as the book says); not paying enough attention to the environment as a major campaigning issue for the Alliance; and not protesting enough at the British police's suppression of demonstrations against Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit in 1999). What other party leader would approach his task with such humility?

Charles Kennedy, of course, still has much to prove. Next year's anticipated election campaign, and particularly the TV debates between the leaders, will put to the test the extent to which he really believes and understands everything that's in this book, as well as his ability to communicate it. But *The Future of Politics* is not a bad start at all.

Duncan Brack was Policy Director of the Liberal Democrats 1988–94, and is Editor of the Journal of Liberal Democrat History.

More mirage than vision

Garry Tregidga: *The Liberal Party in South-West Britain since 1918: Political Decline, Dormancy and Rebirth* (University of Exeter Press, 2000; 281pp.)

Reviewed by John Howe

To those who joined the Liberal Party in the 1950s or 1960s, the West Country was the promised land, or rather the land of promise. Fading memories of triumphs in the twenties were reinforced by the contemporary view of the Liberals as the party of the Celtic fringe; then Torrington in 1958 and North Devon in 1959 created the vision of a Liberal heartland from which the party might expand. But the vision proved a mirage, and even in 1997 fewer than half of the West Country seats fell to the Liberal Democrats.

Garry Tregidga's book examines the background to these events with four successive questions. Why did the Liberal Party achieve a triumph in the south-west in 1923 almost equalling the 1906 landslide? Why was it wiped out only ten months later yet then made a

limited – but only a limited – recovery in 1929? Why did the party decline for two decades thereafter but not die? And why did the series of revivals from 1955 onwards achieve no significant parliamentary success until 1997?

To answer these questions Tregidga has amassed impressive evidence. He has read extensively in the local press, which continued to provide good reports of meetings, speeches and party events with editorial comment reflecting local opinions. The personal papers of the regional party leaders, notably the Aclands and the Foots, have been thoroughly reviewed, and the relevant national collections are cited – for example Sir Archibald Sinclair's papers seem particularly useful for the years just before 1939 when

Tregidga sees signs of a Liberal revival aborted by the war.

The list of party records consulted shows the lamentable lack of surviving Liberal records – only three local parties are listed, compared to seven Conservative and even two Labour. More alarming, while six of the Conservative parties have wisely deposited their archives in the county record offices, two out of the three Liberal collections remain in the vulnerable location of their local party offices.

Several participants in the events have been interviewed and their testimony has been effectively deployed to supplement documentary evidence. One wonders why other key players were not; Jeremy Thorpe is only the most obvious omission, although his splendid agent appears in the select list. The vast amount of published material on the period means that the bibliography is likewise selective; nevertheless the omission of R. C. Whiting's study of Oxford politics is unfortunate and Chris Cook's useful article on local elections between the wars might also have been considered.¹

The book opens by discussing the growth of interest in regional political history, justifying the selection of period and topic. Drawing on European, and particularly Scandinavian, writers, Tregidga suggests a theoretical analytical framework in which 'modern' factors – class and its related

socialist/anti-socialist ideologies – interact with 'old' divisions based on religion, rural/urban and centre/periphery tensions. The 'petite bourgeoisie' had a key role – small farmers, shop-keepers, small businessmen and others were historically strongly illiberal and non-conformist but deeply anti-socialist: for example, alarmed by the 1924 Labour government, they voted 'modern' but by 1929 traditional issues had revived and some returned to the Liberals.

The core of the book is the six chronological chapters covering the years from 1918 to 1959. In each Tregidga has to strike a balance between explaining the national context, describing local events, assessing the strength of party activity locally and nationally, and relating all this to his theoretical framework. This is an extensive agenda, more successful when national developments are fairly straightforward, for example in 1935–40, but less so for the crisis-packed years 1924 or 1930–32, when it is difficult to disentangle national and local factors.

Tregidga's book draws many interesting conclusions. For instance he challenges the standard interpretation of the success of the Yellow Book and Lloyd George's pledge to conquer unemployment in 1929. He points out that unemployment was an urban industrial issue, irrelevant in the south-west where a rural and agricultural programme was necessary to win seats. Interventionist policies were unlikely to attract 'petite bourgeoisie' anti-socialists who had defected to the Conservatives in 1924. Hence, perhaps, the limited recovery of 1929.

Tregidga is frequently scathing about the party's national leadership – or lack of it. The shambles of the early thirties, an ill-founded zeal for a broad front in 1945 and 1950, failure to perceive the opportunity for recovery in the south-west are all castigated. This is not merely with the benefit of hindsight, for examples are quoted of contemporary proponents of an alternative narrow front, including Sinclair himself in 1947.

The 1950s revival is attributed to varied national events – Jo Grimond's

success in dragging the party back to the progressive side, aiming to replace Labour as the party of the left, a drive to fight council seats, and – at last – efforts to target resources on winnable seats. In the south-west this meant that 'petite bourgeoisie' dissatisfaction with the Conservatives was translated into victory at Torrington in 1958 and North Devon in 1959, but a key role was played by individual candidates which may explain why the victories were not repeated elsewhere in the region.

Garry Tregidga's final chapter sweeps from 1959 to 1997. This is clearly attempting too much. Interesting points are made, for example on the revolutionary effects of winning council seats, but it is simply not possible to develop the discussion properly. The debilitating and demoralising debates in seat allocations between the Liberals and the SDP in the mid-1980s are ignored.

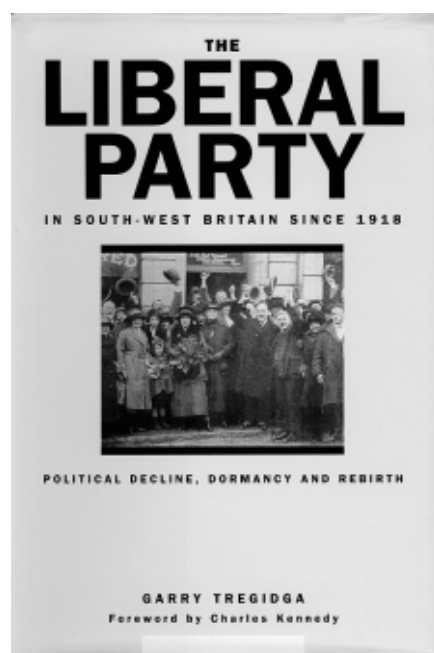
A more basic problem for the book is the definition of the region. Bristol (which some might argue is the regional capital) is ignored. Somerset and Devon are included, but the main focus is on Devon and Cornwall. A more tightly drawn regional boundary might have provided a more logical and manageable region. The problem was well illustrated at a recent Liberal Democrat History Group meeting,² when Michael Steed suggested an extended south-west, up to a line from the Isle of Wight to Oxford, while Malcolm Brown selected the Tamar as frontier.

Overall Garry Tregidga has produced an interesting study. The theoretical material is not always effectively integrated into the narrative and the detail is at times daunting but the end result is a thoughtful and persuasive account of a significant part of twentieth century Liberal history.

John Howe lectures in the School of History and Local Studies of the Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education

1 R. C. Whiting, *The View from Cowley* (Oxford, 1973); C. Cook, 'Liberals, Labour and Local Elections' in G. Peele & C. Cook, *The Politics of Reappraisal 1918–39* (London, 1974).

2 Report on 'Liberalism in the West' fringe meeting, Plymouth, March 2000 (*Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 28, Autumn 2000).



Unremembered – but not forgotten

G. W. Keeton James: *A Liberal Attorney-General; Being the Life of Lord Robson of Jesmond, 1852–1918, with an Account of the Office of Attorney-General, etc.* (Nisbet & Co, 1949)

Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

Who remembers the government's law officers? The post-war lists of Attorneys-General and Solicitors-General are dominated by distinguished but little-known law men (no women, yet). There are a few highlights. Sir Hartley Shawcross, one of the last surviving members of Attlee's governments, is famous for his comment 'We are the masters now'; Geoffrey Howe and Patrick Mayhew served as law officers before establishing their reputations in other, more politically sensitive, positions; Sir Nicholas Lyell is famous for his role in the Matrix Churchill affair; former Liberal MP Sir Dingle Foot became Solicitor-General in the 1966 Wilson administration before resigning over British policy in Southern Rhodesia; and Sir Harry Hylton Foster served for five years as Solicitor-General before becoming Speaker of the House of Commons. But who remembers Sir Lionel Heald, Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller or Sir Peter Rawlinson? And who can name the current law officers, one of whom is the first peer ever to hold the office of Attorney-General?

Despite their obscurity, the law officers play a vital role in advising ministers on the legal complexities of legislative proposals and on the myriad legal problems which government departments encounter from day to day. In the present era this role is performed behind the scenes, but in decades past the law officers were more prominent parliamentarians, required to provide advice on the detailed wording of bills and proposed amendments on the floor of the House of Commons. The pre-1939 list of law officers reflects this differ-

ence, including parliamentarians of the stature of F. E. Smith, Edward Carson, John Simon, Rufus Isaacs and Douglas Hogg. Among this distinguished list is the name of Sir William Robson, Solicitor-General from 1905 to 1908 and Attorney-General from 1908 to 1910.

Robson was born in 1852, the son of a prosperous Newcastle-upon-Tyne businessman. After Cambridge he entered the legal profession, becoming a barrister in 1888, a Queen's Counsel in 1892, and sitting as Recorder of Newcastle from 1895 to 1905. Aside from the law, his passion was politics. Deeply affected by the slums of his native city, he was for his time an 'advanced' Liberal, a key proponent of social legislation to ensure that economic freedom complemented political liberty, and an active seeker of a constituency in the north-east of England.

While based in London he was briefly the Member for Bow & Bromley in the 1885 parliament, but he disliked carpet-bagging and in 1892 stood for Middlesbrough. The constituency was one of the earliest in which Labour candidates took on the Liberal establishment and after a bitter battle Robson lost to the seamen's leader J. Havelock Wilson. One of the most interesting aspects of Keeton's book is the insights it gives into the development of the Labour movement in north-east England and its attitude to the Liberal Party.

Robson was elected Member for South Shields in 1895, but even in this staunchly Liberal constituency he faced a continual battle to prevent independent Labour candidates from opposing him, and he was deeply pessimistic about the Liberal Party's long-term prospects in the face of an organised Labour challenge.

Robson marked himself out as a rising star in the Liberal Party during the 1895 Parliament by his speeches on legal questions and by piloting the Children's Act, a private member's bill, on to the statute book. When Campbell-Bannerman became Prime Minister in 1905 he was disappointed not to be made Attorney-General, but as Solicitor-General he embarked on an exhausting five-year career as a law officer, being promoted to Attorney-General by Asquith in 1908. Keeton brings out well the pivotal role played in the House by law officers at that time. It would not have done for ministers to promise to write to members who raised difficult questions about legislative proposals. Robson served long hours on the Treasury bench providing accurate off-the-cuff responses to complex queries.

He was also responsible for several minor but technical pieces of legislation and represented the Government in numerous legal cases. These are reported rather too prominently by Keeton. A whole chapter is devoted to an intricate case concerning fishing rights in the North Atlantic which, although important in its day and a great triumph for Robson, is only of limited interest now. A general criticism of Keeton's book is that it dwells rather too much on Robson's legal career and the history of the position of Attorney-General at the expense of information about Robson's personal and political lives. The result is a volume which, although informative and entertaining, is somewhat unsatisfying.

Robson's life reached a sad conclusion. He was junior spokesman to Lloyd George during the long passage through Parliament of the 1909 Finance Act. While Lloyd George dealt with the broad outline of the contentious bill, Robson was responsible for the mass of detail it contained. His constitution, never robust, was broken by the long hours he spent in the House of Commons. Forced to retire from politics, he was created Lord Robson of Jesmond in 1910 and made a Lord of Appeal. Unable to recover his health fully, he retired in 1912 and died six years later.

Robert Ingham is a political researcher.

The Limehouse Declaration and the birth of the SDP

On 25 January 1981, four former Labour cabinet ministers – Roy Jenkins, David Owen, William Rodgers and Shirley Williams – published the Limehouse Declaration, publicly signalling their intention to quit the leftward path that the Labour Party had taken. The Declaration advocated a classless society and called for the realignment of British politics. After an overwhelming public response, the SDP came into being two months later.



Twenty years on, the Liberal Democrat History Group looks at the origins and importance of the Limehouse Declaration. Did it signal the end of both Old Labour and Liberal Party irrelevance? Or did it back the progressive forces in British politics into a cul-de-sac?

Was the SDP a mistake? Or was the party essential for both the reform of Labour and a rebirth of Liberalism?

7.00pm, Monday 29 January 2001

(following the AGM of the Liberal Democrat History Group, at 6.30pm)

Lady Violet Bonham Carter Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

History Group News

Enquiry service

The Liberal Democrat History Group receives many queries about various aspects of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history – from questions about past election results in particular constituencies to requests for help in tracking down details of Liberal ancestors to queries about the location of archives. Often these are referred to us from party headquarters. Particularly interesting queries and their answers are occasionally reprinted in the *Journal*.

The History Group executive does its best to provide answers, but we know that readers of the *Journal* possess a very wide range of knowledge and relevant backgrounds. So we would like to ask you to help us deal with these enquiries.

Will anyone willing to help please send an email to enquiry@liberalhistory.org.uk? We will add your email address to an email circulation list, and send everyone on it details of enquiries as they are received. Any

answers you are able to give will be collected and sent back to the enquirer.

Thanks in advance for your help!

New email addresses

The Liberal Democrat History Group is gradually developing its new website, at www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

As part of this process, new email addresses will replace all earlier ones, from 1 January 2001:

- Any correspondence about subscriptions to the *Journal* and membership of the Group: subs@liberalhistory.org.uk
- Any correspondence about any other aspect of the *Journal*, including letters to

the editor, articles and reviews:

journal@liberalhistory.org.uk

- Any general queries about any aspect of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history:

enquiry@liberalhistory.org.uk

Ordinary communication by post, however, is still possible! – see addresses on page 2.

Correction

Journal of Liberal Democrat History 28, Autumn 2000

In David Steel's review of Bill Rodgers' *Fourth Among Equals*, we wrongly assigned Lord Steel MSP to the South of Scotland region. In fact, he is MSP for the Lothian region. Our apologies.