

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

SUMMER 2011

Welsh Liberal History lecture and tribute to Lord Livsey at the Hay Festival

The Hay literature festival, a favourite haunt of Liberal Democrats, this year featured a recollection of Welsh Liberal history. On 26 May, Professor Russell Deacon, the Welsh Liberal historian, gave a 45-minute talk based on an exploration of the development of Wales' oldest political party, some of its heroes and villains and how its more prominent members have shaped Welsh and British history. There was also a special reference made to the late Hay Festival Vice-President and President of the European Movement in Wales, Lord Richard Livsey of Talgarth.

Professor Deacon took the audience through the period from the Welsh party's foundation with the creation of the Welsh National Council on 7 October 1887 up until the recent Welsh Assembly election. The audience learnt how different coalitions and pacts altered the party's name and identity. They discovered the reason why Liberals created a North and a South Wales federation and why a Mid Wales federation never developed.

The Welsh Liberal Party has produced plenty of national heroes and villains over its existence, and many of these

were touched upon: the Lloyd Georges, David, Gwilym and Megan, Clement Davies, Reginald McKenna, Sir Alfred Mond, Tom Ellis, Thomas Waterhouse, Geraint Howells, Emlyn Hooson, Geraint (G.W) Madoc Jones, Roger Roberts, Martin Thomas, Winston Roddick, Mary Murphy (Thomas) and Lord Ogmores.

The talk ended with a tribute to the late Richard Livsey (Baron Livsey of Talgarth). His background in Welsh and then Scottish politics, and the way that he rebuilt the Brecon & Radnor constituency party in the 1980s was explored. His

1985 historic by-election win was the first post-war Welsh Liberal gain and the only one ever in a by-election. Roger Williams MP gave a summary of Lord Livsey's attributes as a leader of the Welsh party, a constituency MP, promoter of devolution, political organiser and finally as a friend and mentor to so many Liberal Democrats. The talk was also attended by Lord Livsey's widow, Rene.

The talk was based on Professor Deacon's forthcoming book: *The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties in Wales* (Welsh Academic Press).

Richard Wainwright, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats: Unfinished Business

by Matt Cole, published by Manchester University Press; foreword by Vince Cable MP

A study of Liberal Party history through the life of one of its parliamentarians, organisers and benefactors during its darkest days, this book examines how and why the Liberals and Liberalism survived from the 1930s to the 21st century. It sees, through Wainwright's experience, the revival of the 1960s, the beginning and end of the Thorpe leadership, the Lib-Lab Pact, the Alliance and the merger; and it highlights the role of Liberal activism and Liberal principles in the party's fate.

'Compulsory reading for the next generation of Liberal Democrat Leaders.'
Simon Hughes MP

'Engrossing ... reading Cole's book, I found Wainwright's life admirable and moving.'
Daniel Finkelstein, The Times

'This wonderful biography captures the essence of a remarkable man and his brand of radical liberalism.'
Baroness Helena Kennedy

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