

expert views on developments in French politics since the 1980s and an attempt by Mao Zedong to make contact with President Roosevelt in 1945, respectively.

Two well-written chapters show the limitations of counterfactual history. Simon Buckby and Jon Mendelsohn argue how Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995 might have prevented a peaceful settlement being reached between Israel and the Palestinians but also recognise that peace would only have been possible if Yasser Arafat had displayed a degree of statesmanship otherwise absent throughout his long career. Duncan Brack gives a blow-by-blow account of how the dispute between the Liberal Party and SDP over defence policy in 1986 should have been avoided, but also recognises that the row was to some extent driven by

the different personalities and perceptions of the two party leaders. Although that specific dispute could have been avoided, the tensions between Owen and Steel which undermined the performance of the Alliance in the 1987 general election were surely inevitable.

In conclusion, *President Gore* presents an interesting range of essays and will appeal to anyone with an interest in political history. Few of the chapters disappoint or, forgetting that counterfactual history is meant to be a technique for analysing what actually did happen, lapse into pure fiction. Few, however, live up to the aims of the editor's introduction and shed new light on old questions.

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professional careers independent of their partners.) The forty spouses whose lives are summarised in these pages are of necessity a very motley bunch. Some remain well-known and relatively famous. Others have lapsed into obscurity. Many of the earlier individuals, like Anne North, Joan Canning, Catherine Wellington, Georgina Salisbury and Hannah Rosebery, are now largely forgotten figures. Other, more contemporary, ladies like Clemmie Churchill, Mary Wilson, Audrey Callaghan and Norma Major, are widely remembered, even admired, by many readers. Of all these married couples, only the Melbournes (formerly Caroline and William Lamb) formally separated, although Dorothy Macmillan repeatedly pestered Harold to release her from a loveless marriage, and for more than thirty years, as is well known, Lloyd George's lifestyle was close to that of a bigamist – and an unfaithful one at that!

There is a huge variation, however, in the amount of space given to each entry. By far the longest piece in the book is on Clementine Churchill (pp. 159–86), herself the subject of a fine biography published in 1979, two years after her death, by her sole surviving child Mary Soames, but there are also substantial essays on Mary Anne Disraeli, Catherine Gladstone, Margot Asquith, Margaret Lloyd George and Dorothy Macmillan. Some consorts such as Anne Grenville, Julia Peel, Sarah Campbell-Bannerman and Annie Bonar-Law are given notably short shrift in about half a page. It would be interesting to know how the author decided on the allocation of space and detail: do these reflect the available amount of published material on each individual, or simply the personal interest of the compiler in each one?

Readers of this journal would be most attracted by the absorbing accounts of

From Catherine Walpole to Cherie Blair

Mark Hitchens, *Prime Ministers' Wives – and One Husband*

(London: Peter Owen, 2004)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

THE APPEARANCE of this fascinating and unique volume is to be warmly welcomed. The characters and personalities of the 'better halves' of leading politicians constitute an endlessly absorbing theme. Indeed, this highly readable tome is an admirable companion volume to Roger Ellis's and Geoffrey Treasure's *Britain's Prime Ministers* (Shepherd-Walwyn, 2005) (reviewed in *Journal of Liberal History* 53 (Winter 2006–07)), with which it can profitably be read in conjunction. The author is a well-known biographer and historian and a retired history teacher. In this timely study, Mark Hitchens examines these thirty-nine wives and one husband (Denis

Thatcher) in the light of their own personalities and achievements as well as the roles they have indirectly played in British history.

The volume provides us with biographies of varying detail of each Prime Minister's consort from Catherine Walpole, the ultimately unfaithful wife of Sir Robert Walpole (generally considered to have been the first British Prime Minister) who predeceased her husband by eight years, to Cherie Blair, wife of the just-departed Prime Minister, and notable for pursuing a professional career in her own right as well as bringing up four children. (Previously only Audrey Callaghan and Denis Thatcher had also enjoyed



PRIME MINISTERS'
WIVES
— AND ONE HUSBAND



MARK HICHENS

Catherine Gladstone – ‘the aristocrat’s daughter, unconventional, disorganised, full of laughter and a touch of the saint’ (p. 75); Margot Asquith – ‘quick-witted, articulate and sometimes shocking ... never long out of the public eye’ (p. 103); and Dame Margaret Lloyd George – ‘a little darling with all her wits about her’ in the words of Margot Asquith (p. 132), although she did not always stick to this opinion! Indeed the portrait of Dame Margaret (in an article carefully vetted by the late lamented Mr John Grigg, the author of a marvellous four-volume biography of Lloyd George), a figure somewhat neglected by historians, is a notably accomplished essay, based on wide and judicious reading and superbly well crafted. But there are also some very fine articles on non-Liberal wives like Lucy Baldwin, Clemmie Churchill (who actually voted Liberal until the end of her long life) and Dorothy Macmillan. Of great fascination, too, is the account of Denis Thatcher who, we are

informed, told his daughter Carol when she was researching his biography that he had savoured being married to ‘one of the greatest women the world [had] ever produced’ (p. 226).

The volume is clearly based on meticulous research and wide-ranging reading extending over no less than ten years. It is impressively comprehensive and up-to-date, judicious and penetrating. Mr Hichens also deals honestly and tactfully with such sensitive issues as the infidelities of Catherine Walpole, the bizarre triangular long-term relationship between Lloyd George, Dame Margaret and ‘the eternal mistress’, Frances Stevenson, and Dorothy Macmillan’s role as mistress to Conservative politician Bob Boothby, a colleague of her husband’s, extending over many years.

The volume includes an authoritative, scholarly introduction, numerous fine portraits and photographs – many previously unpublished – of the

more well-known individuals discussed in the text (although all of these are to be found gathered together between pp. 128–29 in the middle of the article on Dame Margaret Lloyd George, rather than spaced out through the book), and a full bibliography of the biographies and other volumes found most useful by the author in the course of his reading. The longer pieces also have helpful footnote references.

Readers who have enjoyed this compelling, highly readable tome will also savour the same author’s even more recent volume, *Wives of the Kings of England: From Hanover to Windsor*, again published by Peter Owen Publishers in September 2006, another fine study which displays the same meticulous scholarship and lucidity. We eagerly await the author’s future volumes.

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The Liberal Democrats today

Richard S. Grayson (ed.), *Political Quarterly: Special Issue on the Liberal Democrats*, vol. 78, issue 1, 2007 (Blackwell Publishing)

Reviewed by Jeremy Hargreaves

THIS VOLUME is an excellent picture of the Liberal Democrats, and I recommend it to anyone who wants to get a good view of the many different aspects of the party – even those who have been active in it for a while. Its nineteen chapters between them look at a wide range of features of the party – and the detachment of the academic authors of some chapters is well leavened by the fact that several other authors are writing about things

they themselves did or were involved in.

Several of the articles tackle head-on different aspects of the question of who the Liberal Democrats are, in terms of positioning and ideology.

Former Lib Dem Director of Policy and editor of this volume, Richard Grayson, himself has an excellent article looking at the party’s ideology. Measured against Tony Crosland’s definition of a social democratic party he concludes that in its attitude