



Throughout the long years of his public life, William Ewart Gladstone drew great strength and inspiration from books. During Gladstone's bicentenary year, **Peter Francis**, Warden of the national memorial to Gladstone, St Deiniol's Library, reflects on how the great Liberal statesman is still inspiring us today.

# GLADSTONE 200

**I**N HIS study at Hawarden Castle, his 'Temple of Peace', Gladstone had a huge personal collection of over 32,000 books. We know he read most of them because he listed his daily reading in his diary and annotated everything he read. When Gladstone attended the funeral of the Anglican theologian, Edward Pusey, in 1882, the idea of a library based around Pusey's books was suggested and, indeed, was later realised. Gladstone returned to Hawarden convinced that his books could also form the basis

of a library. Friends and colleagues suggested that he should give the books to the Bodleian Library in Oxford while others suggested donating them to the London Library, but Gladstone was adamant that his collection should go to a location that was not already awash with books. He chose Hawarden because it was within easy reach by rail of Manchester and Liverpool, the rapidly growing new cities of the approaching twentieth century, and because it was situated in North Wales, an area renowned for its castles

and mountains rather than as a centre of learning.

## **Naming the library**

At first, Gladstone wanted to call his library *Monad*, a Greek word meaning *oneness* or *one truth*. What the name underlines is Gladstone's firm belief that as much truth could be found in Dante, Homer, Augustine, in works of great literature or in the beauty of mathematics as in the four gospels. However, he later decided to name the library after the sixth-century Welsh saint, Deiniol.

## **From Tin Tabernacle to National Memorial**

Gladstone, then in his eighties, was himself responsible for the removal of books from Hawarden Castle to a corrugated iron building known as the 'Tin Tabernacle', wheeling them the three-quarters of a mile to their new home where he unpacked them and put them on bookcases which he himself had designed, shelving the books according to his own cataloguing system. In this task, he was helped by his daughter, Mary, and a valet. At the same time, he rented the former village



# THE STRANGE BIRTH OF LIBERAL ENGLAND

One hundred and fifty years ago, on 6 June 1859, at Willis' Rooms in St James, Westminster, Radical, Peelite and Whig Members of Parliament met to formalise their Parliamentary coalition to oust the Conservative government. This meeting brought about the formation of the Liberal Party.

To commemorate the event, the Liberal Democrat History Group and the National Liberal Club are organising a joint reception (7.00pm) and dinner (7.30pm) at the Club on 20 July 2009. After dinner, **Professor Anthony Howe** of the University of East Anglia, author of *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* and *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*, will speak on the political background to the meeting in Willis' Rooms and the formal birth of the Liberal Party.

Admission to the event will include wine at the reception and dinner at a cost of £40. If you would like to celebrate 150 years of Liberalism with us, please contact:

The Club Secretary, National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE  
Tel 020 7930 9871, fax 020 7839 4768, email [secretary@nlc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@nlc.org.uk)

**7.00pm, Monday 20 July 2009**

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

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school as a hostel for readers. Gladstone was ahead of his time in recognising the benefits of residential learning.

Following his death in 1898, the present library was built as the National Memorial to Gladstone. It is an elegant Victorian building with two wings – one for the books and one for the residents – and has a Grade 1 listing. Today, Gladstone's initial donation has grown into a world-renowned collection of more than 250,000 books, journals and pamphlets. St Deiniol's is recognised as Britain's finest residential library and its only Prime Ministerial library. Each year, the

library, which specialises in theology and Victorian Studies, attracts thousands of visitors from many different walks of life and from many parts of the world. They come – on their own or as part of a group – to read, write or reflect, to debate or discuss or just to get away and spend time relaxing in the unique atmosphere of St Deiniol's.

To follow in the spirit of Gladstone during his bicentenary year, St Deiniol's is launching the Gladstone 200 Campaign to fund a series of bold and imaginative initiatives. It includes plans for an Islamic Reading Room which, alongside courses and

lectures, will help promote dialogue between Christianity and Islam. The Reading Room will contain books on Islam for the benefit of all, from non-Muslims to Islamic scholars.

In addition, there will also be a Religious Education Resource Centre to provide an up-to-date facility for teachers, community leaders and parents. Although Gladstone was a committed Anglican, he wanted the library to be for 'all Christian denominations; not only for Christian denominations but for all religions, not only for all religions but for people of any ideology'.

In 2009, St Deiniol's Library is once again addressing the most pressing needs of contemporary society with innovation and imagination, just as its founder, William Gladstone would have done.

A number of bicentenary events are taking place at various venues throughout the UK and in Bulgaria. Full details are available on the bicentenary page of the library website [www.st-deiniols.org](http://www.st-deiniols.org) or contact Annette Lewis at St Deiniol's Library, Church Lane, Hawarden, Flintshire CH5 3DF. Tel: 01244 532350 or email: [annette.lewis@st-deiniols.org](mailto:annette.lewis@st-deiniols.org)