

Windscheffel covers the whole span of Gladstone's career as a bibliophile, from his earliest steps in book-buying as a child to his endowing and building of St Deiniol's Library at Hawarden (in North Wales) at the end of his life. St Deiniol's became a centre for theological and historical studies, Anglican in spirit but open to all. It was perhaps the first 'residential library' in the country and became a model for other similar establishments which were founded in the twentieth century, such as the Ancient India and Iran Trust at Cambridge.

St Deiniol's replicated some of the features, and certainly the spirit, of Gladstone's own 'Temple of Peace', his study at Hawarden Castle. The latter was designed and conceived as a space of intense academic and intellectual engagement, and in this respect contrasted sharply with the spirit and function of the conventional 'gentleman's library', where books would not necessarily be used, but rather displayed 'as a matter of form' (as Gladstone lamented (p. 148)). His being so much out of step with convention was at first a political disadvantage: at the time 'gentlemen', and especially politicians, were expected to be faintly anti-intellectual and actively 'practical' in their approach to the public sphere, and Gladstone's scholarly relationship with his library seemed more appropriate to a 'monk' than a statesman. In fact, it attracted embarrassing comments on his masculinity. In a fascinating section of her book, Windscheffel studies how Gladstone responded to such characterisations, especially in the aftermath of the 1846 Conservative Party split over the Repeal of the Corn Laws, when cartoonists contrasted his 'intellectual' and 'feminine' attitude to the crisis with the pragmatic and 'masculine' motives displayed by his colleagues. Over the 1850s and 1860s he

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managed to recast his own public image and, indirectly, the standards by which statesmen should be judged. First, he asserted himself as the 'scholar-politician', the Chancellor of the Exchequer characterised by an undisputed mastery of Treasury facts and figures. In order to cultivate such an image he encouraged the portrayal, in photographs and watercolours, of himself at work surrounded by books, whether in Downing Street or at Hawarden. Thus '[h]is library was represented as a place of useful work rather than as a symbol of privilege or a scholar's ivory tower. The "Grand Old Bookman" was continuing the work of popular liberalism albeit from inside a Castle library' (p. 234). This strategy of turning his alleged clerical shortcomings to his political advantage was further developed in later years; by the late 1870s 'the People's William' emerged as the semi-revivalist statesman. He confused the critics of his monk-like habits by developing what John Vincent described as a 'semi-Episcopal' approach to leadership, and asserted his moral entitlement

to the 'pastoral' care of his flock, including a 'magisterial' approach to their instruction for the purpose of leading them along a narrow path, through fiscal responsibility and political liberalism, to a fuller sense of citizenship and humanity.

Windscheffel's central argument is that '[r]eading was for Gladstone not merely a matter of hermeneutics – the interior art of interpretation – it was significantly also the springboard for his exegesis – or expository discourse – to others' (p. 236). In this superbly researched book she has fully established her case. In the process she has produced a perceptive, sympathetic and brilliant reconstruction of an intimately and yet publicly important dimension of the personality and career of one of the greatest Liberal leaders of all times.

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## A neglected party

David Dutton, *Liberals in Schism – A History of the National Liberal Party* (Tauris Academic Studies, 2008).

Reviewed by **Malcolm Baines**

**F**OLLOWING THE publication of *A History of the Liberal Party* in 2004, Professor David Dutton of Liverpool University has now turned his attention in this new publication to the party's neglected ugly sister. In doing this, he has shed a perceptive and sympathetic light on the Liberal Nationals (after 1945, the National Liberals) who broke away from the

Liberal Party in 1931 over the extent to which the National Government could abandon the traditional Liberal support for international free trade to deal with the economic and fiscal crisis that marked the onset of the Great Depression.

The Liberal Nationals have been written out of the history of liberalism in the twentieth century. Indeed, many Liberals

have argued that they were not liberals at all, being in effect crypto-Conservatives from the moment that they failed to follow the Liberal Cabinet ministers, Samuel and Sinclair, in resigning in September 1932 over the creation of a formal system of imperial preference. In part, this is because history is invariably written by the winners, and in this instance neither the present-day Liberal Party nor the Conservative Party have had much reason to remember them. It is, however, not often realised that Clement Davies, leader of the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1956, was a Liberal National MP throughout the 1930s, nor that well-known former Cabinet ministers such as Michael Heseltine and John Nott began their political careers as candidates of joint Conservative and National Liberal associations.

David Dutton has written the first balanced account of the history of the National

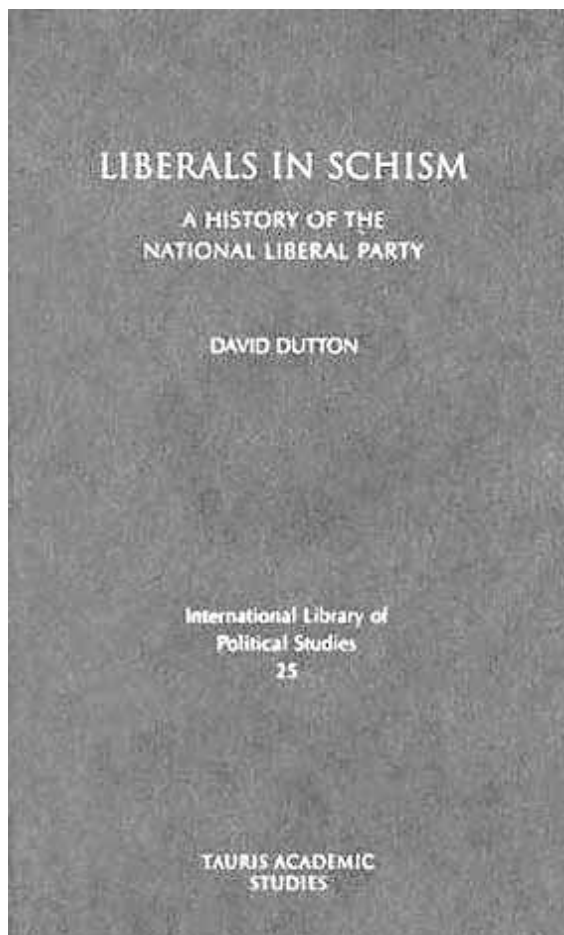
Liberals in this well-researched and well-written book covering the whole of the party's history. It starts with its genesis as a group of Liberal Party MPs in the 1929–31 Parliament who thought Lloyd George too sympathetic to Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government, and ends in 1968 when the party formally wound itself up, some twenty years after the merging of the constituency organisations through the Woolton-Teviot pact with the Tories had led most outside observers to conclude that it had lost what little independence it had left.

Dr Dutton astutely picks up the different themes that characterised the Liberal Nationals during the period, starting with the extent to which they could be contrasted with those Liberals who supported Sir Herbert Samuel's decision to leave the National Government. On policy grounds the Liberal Nationals stood for a willingness to abandon the Liberal shibboleth of free trade in favour of supporting greater government intervention in the economy in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s. More importantly, the Liberal Nationals were characterised by a conviction that Liberal MPs could do more good inside a National Government than outside it. Dutton powerfully argues the case that the Liberal National leaders – including such relatively well-known figures as Sir John Simon, Walter Runciman and Leslie Hore-Belisha – not only held a disproportionate number of ministerial posts but also enabled Baldwin, the Conservative leader (and prime minister from 1935 to 1937) to exclude the Tory right from both power and office in the 1930s. Moreover, it was not until the failure of the Liberal–Liberal National merger negotiations during the Second World War that the permanency of the split was acknowledged by the two groups. Until that point,

for most local Liberal associations their loyalty was to the local MP and not to the official Liberal Party nationally. Indeed the Liberal Year Book continued to include pictures of MPs from both camps well into the 1930s.

The Second World War changed the political landscape dramatically by bringing Labour to power in 1945. At one stroke this removed the Liberal Nationals' role as leaven to a National Government whilst at the same time making a Liberal–Conservative rapprochement more important to the Tories if they were to create a united anti-socialist front. Simultaneously, Conservatives in the areas of former Liberal National strength were becoming increasingly restive at having to defer electorally to a junior partner whose organisation, never robust to begin with (as Dutton explored in the *Journal* last year in relation to Wrexham), was ceasing to exist. The Woolton-Teviot pact of 1948 marked the formalisation of the merger between the local party organisations of the Conservatives and the National Liberals, although the parliamentary group continued to meet separately.

Dutton then looks at the role of the National Liberals once the Conservatives returned to office in 1951. He struggles to find much evidence that it had one, other than as a quaint relic of previous political history. Much reduced in size and influence and including some members with a Conservative rather than a Liberal background, Dutton sees the party acting as something of a pressure group against Butskellism and the willingness of the Tories not to challenge the consensus put in place by the Attlee government rather than as an independent political party. He goes on, however, to highlight in an interesting way both the extent to which the National



Liberals could be regarded as proto-Thatcherite and the connections they had with figures such as John Poulson, who later became better known for reasons other than his support for the National Liberals.

The party finally came to an end after Labour's electoral victory in 1966, unloved by both its erstwhile partner, the Conservative Party, and the Liberals who, under the leadership of Jo Grimond, had begun their move from being a right-of-centre, pro-small-business, free-trade party to a left-of-centre, socially radical party concerned with constitutional reform and local government.

This is a good, readable yet scholarly history of the National Liberal Party throughout its short but eventful life. To anyone fascinated by the reasons for the Liberal Party's survival in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, it provides an experiment in what might have happened to

British liberalism were it not for Samuel, Sinclair and their followers. The book deals with an area that had been largely neglected by Liberal historians, who have tended to follow leading politicians from all parties in writing off the Liberal Nationals as ineffectual and self-serving. Dutton's study therefore makes interesting reading for Liberals as to what might have been: after all, the debate about whether Liberals have more influence through membership of a wider 'sympathetic' political grouping or through a pristine independence is one that has continued to the present.

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present reviewer to find such heavy use made of the extensive Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records in the custody of the National Library of Wales. Strangely, those of the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association, equally extensive, have been quarried far less frequently. As far as the personal archives of Liberal politicians are concerned, especially effective use has been made of the Lloyd George Papers and the Sir Percy Harris Papers at the Parliamentary Archive, the House of Lords, and those of Sir William Beveridge at BLPES (the British Library of Political and Economic Science). All these sources have clearly yielded much significant and fresh material.

Thorpe's text is divided into eight discrete chapters which examine in turn the management of the political parties nationally (particularly their leaders and headquarters), those who stood as parliamentary candidates and became MPs, those who served as regional and local agents and organisers (especially their numbers and changing roles), the membership of the parties, and the events and activities (or sometimes conspicuous lack of activity) which took place in the constituencies. Social as well as political activities are considered here in three fine chapters. A short discussion of the parties' funding and finances precedes a brief concluding section.

The author presents some interesting material on the role of Liberal politicians in helping to bring about the fall of Neville Chamberlain and his succession by Churchill in May 1940 and the extent to which some of them were then rewarded with ministerial positions. He tends to be critical of the leadership of Sir Archibald Sinclair, who remained at the helm from 1935 until 1945, and was anxious to continue the coalition government even after the end of the

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## How the Liberal Party fared 1939–45

Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organisation in Second World War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

**T**HE FINE reputation of Andrew Thorpe, Professor of History at the University of Exeter, as a top-ranking political historian was made by such seminal works as *The British General Election of 1931* (1991) and, more recently, *A History of the British Labour Party* (2008). The present, even more impressive work, based on meticulous research throughout, examines the internal organisation of the three major political parties in Britain between 1939 and 1945. It arose from the author's self-confessed 'double curiosity' (p. vii) – a desire to research the

many surviving local records of the political parties, scattered in numerous record offices and libraries throughout the realm, and a deep-rooted wish to re-evaluate the development of these parties during the Second World War.

Dr Thorpe's intensive research unveiled no fewer than 106 groups of records deriving from the Labour Party, 96 for the Conservatives, and just 26 emanating from the Liberal Party. For regional party archives, the survival rate was much more equal (p. 9). It was gratifying for the