

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

war in Europe in 1945. This reflected both a fundamental 'hunger for power' and a belief that such a post-war administration would be 'essentially liberal' (p. 51). Much space is given to the role of the National Liberals during the war years and their relationship with the mainstream party. There is also a fresh reconsideration of the Liberal campaign in the July 1945 general election, their humiliation at the polls and the party's generally positive, upbeat (possibly ostrich-like) response to electoral defeat.

George Grey, the MP for Berwick, was the only Liberal MP to be killed on active service during the war years. It was his death which led to the election of Sir William Beveridge to the House of Commons, a much-needed boost to the flagging morale and fortunes of the Liberal Party. Even so, both Sinclair and Major Gwilym Lloyd-George apparently had their doubts about the course of events (p. 54). Megan Lloyd George, the Liberal MP for

Anglesey since 1929, who broadcast to the nation no fewer than fourteen times between October 1942 and October 1943, was also increasingly in the public eye. Yet all too often the party failed to act in unison in the lobbies of the Commons, conspicuously failing to render consistent support to the government and exasperating Churchill, who even formally complained to Sinclair about his unruly followers and threatened to reduce the number of Liberal MPs who held ministerial office. In Dr Thorpe's words, 'But little changed, and the continuing inability of the LPP [Liberal Parliamentary Party] to act as a unit did little to improve the party's image or profile' (p. 71).

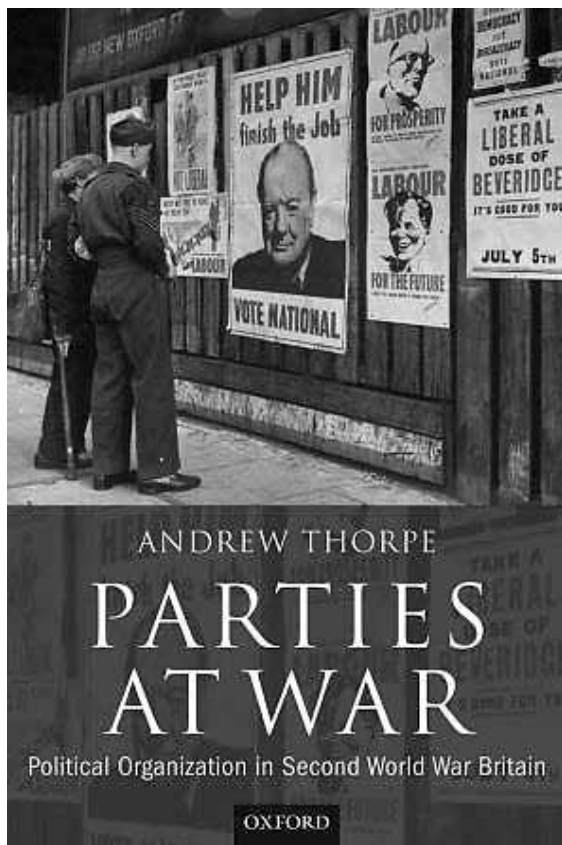
Thorpe has also undertaken some fascinating research work on the role of women within the organisation of the Liberal Party during the war years. He concludes that, although there had emerged 'some prominent women' within the party by this time, it was generally woefully tardy to select women parliamentary candidates. Twenty Liberal women were eventually nominated in 1945.

Turning to the role of the full-time salaried agent within the Liberal Party, the author finds that the number of such agents had declined markedly during the 1930s, and a scheme launched by the *Manchester Guardian* whereby party agents could earn commission by enrolling new subscribers to the newspaper tended to flounder. During the war years there was no improvement, and many agents joined the armed forces. There was no new drive until after 1945. Dr Thorpe's meticulous researches into party membership found that the experience of each of the major political parties was broadly similar: generally the period of three years from May 1940 was one of sustained decline. Thereafter a renewed political polarisation in the wake of the

impact of the famous Beveridge Report, escalating calls for post-war reconstruction and the real impact of the dynamic Radical Action group saw the launch of a renewed recruitment drive which achieved some, if patchy, success. There was certainly an inflow of new Liberal Party members in 1944–45, some of whom were destined to play a key role during the 1950s.

More space is devoted to constituency associations and activities than to any other theme; a whole chapter is given to each of the parties. Many Liberal associations had floundered during the 1930s, and only a partial success was achieved during the war years in the attempt to revive them. The relatively paltry total of 306 Liberal candidates in July 1945 was partly a reflection of this failure. Thorpe's detailed research found evidence of local disagreements, financial difficulties and a deep-rooted political malaise. The Meston reforms of 1936 had not been a great success. But lively Liberal campaigns did surface on the rising cost of living in 1938 and old age pensions the following year. Grassroots activity was generally unimpressive, but at least continued to exist in most areas, laying the foundation for revival in the 1950s and thereafter. In north Wales, predictably, the influence of Lloyd George (the MP for the Caernarvon Boroughs ever since 1890) remained potent. When he proposed a negotiated peace with Germany in October 1939, uproar erupted in the proceedings of the North Wales Liberal Federation. Just a week earlier old LG had felt compelled severely to water down a speech in his constituency as a result of repeated warnings about the strong pro-war views of his audience (p. 223).

The final chapter examines pecuniary matters. The author probably exaggerates the extent to which the Liberal Party had



been dependent on the sale of honours and the infamous Lloyd George Fund during the inter-war period (p. 268). After all, there were times and general elections when the 'Welsh Wizard' had been most reluctant to share it. Although by 1945 the Liberal Party was not as impoverished as is often suggested and indeed spent a considerable sum on the general election campaign, for the first time in that year its candidates were outspent by those of the Labour Party. The total of only 307 Liberal candidates was partly the result of financial pressures.

Overall this most impressive tome has given us a fuller picture than ever available before of the story of the major political parties between 1939

and 1945. Professor Thorpe has made use of a very wide range of disparate source materials to illuminate with impeccable scholarship the role and organisation of the political parties throughout these crucial years. The regional aspect of his work is also striking, with regional trends and differences always in the foreground of the analysis. Although the timespan of the analysis is relatively short, there are constant references to the backdrop of the inter-war years and to the development of the political parties during the long 1950s too.

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correspondence, which covers the whole of his ministerial career from 1809 until 1865, accounts for most of the 40,000 items in the archive.

The semi-official papers are divided into a number of sequences. The royal (RC) and general (GC) correspondence are the most significant in terms of both content and size. The royal section includes correspondence with William IV, 1830–37, Queen Victoria, 1837–65, and Prince Albert, 1840–61, as well as their private secretaries, Victoria, Duchess of Kent, Edward, Prince of Wales and the Dukes of Cambridge, Edinburgh and Sussex. By far the largest sequence is that of general correspondence (GC), which is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. Although it covers the period 1809–65, the general correspondence is concentrated in particular periods. This material is supported by a number of smaller sequences, which for the most part have a more subject-based arrangement.

Palmerston gained especial renown in the field of foreign affairs. The widely held contemporary image of him was of the staunch defender of Britain, who would 'uphold old England's glorious fame' and would use any means to achieve this. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that of the collection as a whole, about three-quarters consists of Palmerston's papers as Foreign Secretary. A substantial quantity of this material, to be found in the GC series, is composed of his private correspondence with British diplomats, although there are also five hundred letters to Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister, for the period 1846–51. The breadth of this correspondence provides a testament to the range of British global interests and to the volatility of the international scene. Subjects range from the formation of Belgium and Italy, the 1848 revolutions in Europe,

# ARCHIVES

Palmerston's papers at the Hartley Library, University of

Southampton

by Karen Robson

**H**ENRY JOHN Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, born in 1784 at Broadlands, Hampshire, was the elder son of Henry Temple, second Viscount Palmerston, and his second wife, Mary Mee. Palmerston was educated at Harrow and then sent to study with Dugald Stewart in Edinburgh before finally proceeding to St John's College, Cambridge in 1803. In the previous year, at the age of seventeen, Palmerston had succeeded to the title.

Palmerston secured a seat in Parliament in 1806, through the offices of his guardian, Lord Malmesbury, and remained an MP until his death in office

fifty-eight years later in 1865. In 1809 he accepted the post of Secretary at War, declining that of Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was to remain in the War Office for nearly twenty years. Palmerston was a long-serving Foreign Secretary, filling the post on three occasions: 1830–34, 1835–41 and 1846–51. He subsequently served as Home Secretary (1852–55) before being becoming Prime Minister, 1855–58 and 1858–65.

Palmerston's papers form part of MS 62. The archive is predominately composed of correspondence relating to Palmerston's political career. This semi-official