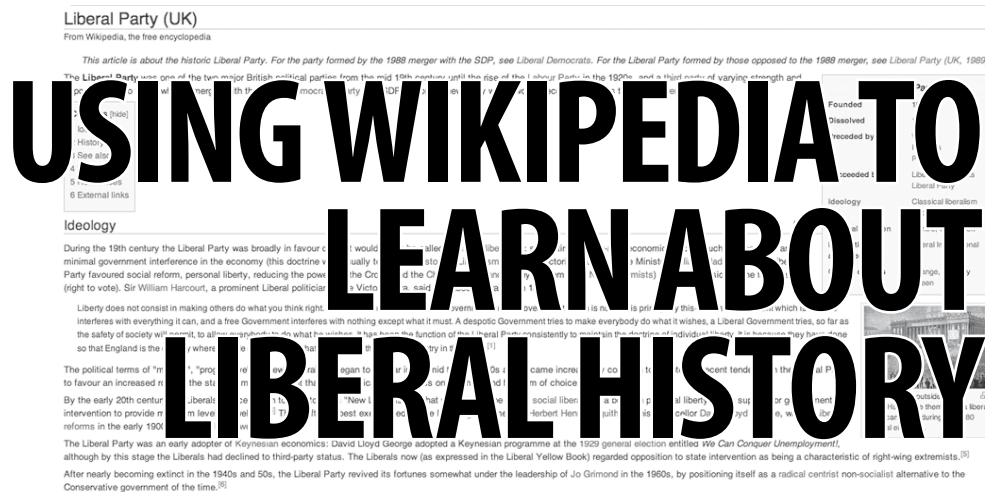


The internet is an amazing tool for gathering information and provides a wealth of helpful sites for learning about the people and events that have made Liberal history – not least the website of the Liberal Democrat History Group itself ([www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk)).

One great advantage of the Internet as a research tool is the speed at which information can be traced and accessed and the ease with which links can be made to similar sites in order to build up a complete picture of the chosen topic. There are so many websites relating to subjects such as Liberal history and politics that to list them would prove to be an endless task. This article is therefore confined to the consideration of one specific, albeit huge, website – Wikipedia. **Graham Lippiatt** explores its possibilities – and limitations..



**W**IKIPEDIA IS a multilingual, web-based encyclopaedia which uses links as cross-references to guide the reader from the initial article to related pages or to external websites. Articles also include guides to further reading and contributors tend to cite their sources carefully (though not always!). Its most innovative aspect is that Wikipedia articles are written by the public: anyone can log on and create new pages or edit existing material. Volunteers do not need specialised qualifications to contribute, since their primary role is to write articles that cover their existing knowledge. However, in practice, most entries are written by people who know their subject well or are experts or professionals in their sphere. Of course, there are standards to be maintained: the website is subject to editorial administration, oversight and management. Published editing policies exist, which contributors are requested to follow, and articles are subject to peer review in order to avoid plagiarism and libel and to ensure that articles are correctly sourced with citations and references.

#### **Is Wikipedia a reliable source for Liberal history?**

Wikipedia users do need to be wary. Even the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, has commented that Wikipedia may not be suitable for academic uses, saying, 'It is pretty good, but you have to be careful with it. It's good enough knowledge, depending on

what your purpose is.' For example, not all facts can be verified straight away by reviewers but those articles that are subject to query will usually contain an alert at the head of the page indicating that the reader should be cautious. Reasons vary, from insufficient referencing and internal links to articles that appear to contradict themselves. Generally speaking, Wikipedia facilitates the reader's research immensely via its multiple internal and external links (just click on the highlighted words) and its – usually comprehensive – further reading and source lists.

For the general reader or amateur historian, it seems safest to agree with those academics and teachers who advise that while Wikipedia cannot be accepted or cited as an authoritative source, it remains a useful starting point from which to gain contextual information about your subject matter and can point the way to more reliable and fuller source material.

In order to search for an article you need only to enter the text into the search box and press 'enter'. But be warned, Wikipedia can be very case- and punctuation-sensitive – so be sure to follow the exact wording and punctuation of the articles suggested here to access the right pages.

Having arrived at the Wikipedia main page ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)), where to start? Below is a list of pages organised around the theme of Liberal history: political parties, people, liberal philosophy, thought and thinkers, parliamentary reform

## USING WIKIPEDIA TO LEARN ABOUT LIBERAL HISTORY

and legislation, parliamentary elections, parliamentary constituencies and local elections.

The names of the relevant pages in Wikipedia are shown here in italics. All page names were correct at the time of going to print.

### Political parties

- *Liberal Democrats* – This is about the present-day party, its structure and policies and history from the 1988 merger to date.

- *Liberal Party (UK)* – This article discusses the ideology, origins and history of the Liberal Party from the Whigs until 1988 when it merged with the Social Democratic Party.

- *Social Democratic Party (UK)* – Information about the origins and history of the SDP from 1981–88.

- *National Liberal Party (UK)* – There were two distinct groups bearing the name National Liberal. The first comprised the supporters of the Lloyd George coalition in 1922–23. The second included those Liberals supporting the National Government from 1931 onwards. From October 1931 they styled themselves as Liberal Nationals and were entirely separate from the official Liberals, who returned to the opposition benches in 1933. These MPs and their supporters in the constituencies gradually moved closer to the Conservatives. After 1948, the party was renamed the National Liberal Party and was so closely aligned with the Conservatives that the two eventually merged in 1968.

- *British Whig Party* – A page about the Whigs, one of the groups from which the Liberal Party was formed, from their origins around the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the formation of the Liberal Party in 1859.

- *Peelites* – Information about the breakaway faction of the Conservatives from 1846 who became part of the Liberal Party in 1859.

- *Liberal Unionist Party* – This was the party, led by Lord Hartington

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and Joseph Chamberlain, which split from Gladstone over Irish Home Rule in 1886 and formally merged with the Conservatives in 1912.

- *Alliance Party of Northern Ireland* – Pages about the Liberal Democrats' sister party in Northern Ireland. The section about its origins connects to a short page about the now-defunct Ulster Liberal Party and biographies of its two MPs, Albert McElroy and Sheelagh Murnaghan.

- *Liberal-Labour (UK)* – The Liberal-Labour movement refers to the practice of local Liberal associations in the late nineteenth century accepting and supporting candidates who were financially maintained by trade unions. These candidates stood for Parliament with the aim of representing the working classes, while remaining supportive of the Liberal Party in general. The page has a link to the article *Category:Liberal-Labour politicians (UK)*, which gives biographies of Lib-Lab MPs.

- *Lib-Lab Pact* – This page not only describes the Parliamentary arrangement of 1977–78 between Liberal leader David Steel and Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, but also looks at earlier attempts at cooperation between the Liberal and Labour parties and some more recent ones in the devolved administrations since 1999.

### People

Who interests you? You can start by going to the pages of any of the great Liberals who have made history: Gladstone, Lloyd George, Jo Grimond, Roy Jenkins, or you might prefer to start with key thinkers like Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill or William Beveridge. However, if you prefer a more systematic approach, the best place to begin is:

- *List of United Kingdom Liberal Party leaders* – this page lists leaders of the party, leaders in the Commons and the Lords from 1859–1988. A page entitled *List of United Kingdom Liberal Democrat leaders*, which takes the story from the merger of 1988 to the present

day, follows it. The three leaders of the SDP are included in the *Social Democratic Party (UK)* page. For the period before the formation of the Liberal Party see *List of United Kingdom Whig and allied party leaders 1801–1859*.

For details of Members of Parliament there are a number of pages:

- *List of Liberal Party (UK) MPs* – This lists all Liberal MPs from 1924–88 and their constituencies and takes you to constituency profiles and biographies of the MPs where these exist. There are similar pages for the following relevant political parties:

- *List of Social Democratic Party (UK) MPs*

- *List of National Liberal Party (UK) MPs*

- *List of Liberal Democrat MPs*

- *Members of the House of Lords* – This gives profiles of most of the current peers and lists their party affiliation and type of peerage.

- *List of Life Peerages* – This page lists everyone who has been created a Life Peer from the introduction of the Life Peerages Act of 1958 until the present day. Unfortunately it does not show their political party, so you have to know who you are looking for, but most entries have biographical profiles. From this page you can link to lists of all the hereditary peerages and baronies but again, no political party affiliations are indicated.

- *List of British Members of Parliament who crossed the floor (from 1945 to 2008)* – This is an interesting and useful page for information on SDP members.

- *Category:Liberal MPs (UK)* – Here you will find listed alphabetically all Liberal MPs elected at any time where their biographies feature in Wikipedia.

### Philosophies, thought and thinkers

- *Liberalism* – This page offers a good starting point for learning

about the ideology of liberalism. It is part of a series of pages about liberalism in its varied and distinct forms. It has sections on the development of liberalism, the history of liberal thought and contributions to liberal theory. It provides information on the various schools of liberalism – for example, social liberalism, classical liberalism, American liberalism, libertarianism etc. – as well as links to pages concerning thinkers and ideas (e.g. laissez-faire, freedom, rights etc.)

- *Radicalism* – This article deals with the Radical movement in Britain in the nineteenth century, its relationship with overseas variants and how it overlaps with elements of liberalism.

- *Progressivism* – An analysis of some different understandings of progressive politics and how they connect to liberalism.

- *List of liberal theorists* – This is an incomplete list of individual contributors to liberal political theory on a worldwide scale, which also includes links to biographies of many liberal thinkers and philosophers from Locke and Mill to figures such as Keynes or Kymlicka.

- *Liberal reforms* – This is a review of the social reforms of the Liberal government from 1906–14, which are considered as having laid the foundations for what became the welfare state.

- *Oxford Manifesto* – This is worth visiting because the Oxford Manifesto, written in 1947, is the document which inspired the creation of Liberal International, the worldwide group that brings together Liberal parties from all nations and promotes liberalism as an international philosophy. The page includes a link to the article about Liberal International, which in turn provides links to member parties from around the world, the umbrella groups for European liberal parties, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, as well as other international Liberal organisations, think-tanks and foundations.

### Parliamentary reform and legislation

Parliamentary reform is a key area of Liberal thought and policy from the eighteenth century to the present day; aspects of constitutional, parliamentary and franchise reform can be followed through the *Representation of the People Act* pages, which begin with the background to the Great Reform Bill of 1832 and trace the history, politics and some of the personalities involved as far as the last Representation of the People Act in 2000.

For legislation, go to *List of Acts of Parliament in the United Kingdom*. Here, you can research the Acts of Parliament passed under any Liberal government by scrolling through the years during which the Liberals were in power. Regrettably, there are very few links to pages with detailed information on those Acts.

### Parliamentary elections

- *United Kingdom general elections* – Here you will find details of all general elections since 1802, with dates, Prime Ministers, parties and majorities in the House of Commons. This page has internal links to detailed articles on each general election from 1802 to 2005 with information on seats, gains, losses, overall votes, etc.

- For UK by-elections, there is a series of pages listing all parliamentary by-elections since 1885 with dates and names of winners. Many of these include details on results and candidates. Start at the page entitled *List of United Kingdom by-elections (1885–1900)* and follow the series through to the present day. There is also a series of Category pages, which contain links to articles on selected by-elections in specific areas, such as Welsh constituencies, or jurisdictions such as the Scottish Parliament. Go to the ‘categories’ index page and type in *by-elections* in the display box to show the list.

- *United Kingdom by-election records* – this page contains information about notable records at by-elections, such as the biggest swings, lowest or highest shares of the vote, smallest majorities and

many other obscure yet interesting topics.

- *MPs elected in the United Kingdom general election, 1874* – This series of pages contains information to complement the lists of Liberal MPs available in other articles. It lists every constituency contested, the MP elected and his/her party and provides links to constituency and MP profiles, where they exist. The first page in the series is on the 1874 general election. You can then, starting from this article, follow the elections through to 2005 and after – the series currently ends with the next general election, to be held before June 2010.

### Parliamentary constituencies

- *List of United Kingdom Parliament constituencies* – These pages list current seats in Parliament with descriptions of the geographical area that each covers, as well as the MPs (specifying political party) who have represented the seat since it was created. Some (too few, unfortunately) have recent election results in full and a handful give full results going back to the early twentieth century.

- *List of former United Kingdom Parliamentary constituencies* – Details of now defunct Parliamentary seats going back as far as the thirteenth century, again with descriptions of the geographical area covered and lists of MPs and their parties.

- *List of multi-member constituencies in the United Kingdom and predecessor Parliaments* – Multi-member constituencies, with more than one MP elected by first-past-the-post, were common in Britain until they were abolished in 1918. This often meant that a constituency was represented by MPs of different parties, creating a crude form of proportionality, thus enabling the Liberal Party to make arrangements with Labour in certain industrial seats to ensure one member from each party would be elected. These pages list the seats as far back as 1295 and some, but unfortunately not all, give full election results with names of all candidates, parties and numbers of votes.

**For the general reader or amateur historian, it seems safest to agree with those academics and teachers who advise that while Wikipedia cannot be accepted or cited as an authoritative source, it remains a useful starting point from which to gain contextual information about your subject matter and can point the way to more reliable and fuller source material.**

### Local elections

The information available on local elections, election results and Liberal councillors is not yet well developed on Wikipedia. However, a good starting point is *United Kingdom local elections, 1998*. This page is the first in a series, which can be followed through to 2007, which shows the overall outcome for the parties in all local authority elections that took place each year (including mayoral contests where appropriate). Unfortunately, it does not provide details on individual ward results with information on candidates and votes.

• *London County Council* – One of the more useful pages about historical local authorities and elections, this article recites the

history of the London County Council (LCC) from its foundation in 1889 until its replacement in 1965 by the Greater London Council (GLC). It lists the leaders of the LCC, the first four of whom were Progressives (the name by which Liberal supporters were known) on the council in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The pages entitled *Greater London Council* and *Greater London Authority* also contain information in elections or provide links to related pages. Alternatively you can go to *Category:Elections in London* for information about GLC, GLA and Mayoral elections in the capital from 1964 onwards.

You will tend to find that simply accessing a single article or

biography opens up dozens of other potential links to internal Wikipedia or external internet sites. But if the article or biography or other information you want is not in any of the pages recommended in this article or the links from them to other sites, just enter what you are looking for in the Wikipedia search box and see what comes up. If it cannot find an exact match it will give near misses or suggestions for similar pages. And, if whilst browsing through Wikipedia you find a gap in the Liberal history knowledge base about which you are an expert, why not log on and create some pages yourself?

*Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group*

# THE PAPERS OF HERBERT SAMUEL AT THE PARLIAMENTARY ARCHIVES

**H**ERBERT LOUIS Samuel (1870–1963), 1st Viscount Samuel, was born on 6 November 1870 in Liverpool. He was educated at University College School, London, 1884–88, and Balliol College, Oxford, 1889–93. He married Beatrice Miriam Franklin on 17 November 1897. He was Liberal MP for the Cleveland Division of Yorkshire 1902–18, and for the Darwen Division of Lancashire 1929–35.

Positions Samuel held include: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department 1905–09; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1909–10; Postmaster-General 1910–14; President of the Local Government Board 1914–15; again Postmaster-General and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1915–16; Home Secretary 1916, and again 1931–32; High Commissioner for Palestine 1920–25 and also Commander-in-Chief there 1922–25. For the Liberal Party he was Chairman of the

Liberal Party Organisation 1927–29; Chairman of the Liberal Parliamentary Party 1931–35; and Liberal Leader in the House of Lords 1944–55. On 8 June 1937, he was created Viscount Samuel of Mount Carmel and of Toxteth in the City of Liverpool. He died on 5 February 1963.

In 1963 the second Viscount Samuel, on behalf of his father's executors, deposited in the Parliamentary Archives the papers which now form series SAM/A–F. The Samuel papers cover his life and career from his childhood until the year of his death. Lord Samuel took care, so far as possible, to preserve intact both the personal and political letters, and also the papers which he received. In addition he kept drafts and copies of his own letters and made a practice of writing notes concerning any important events in which he had participated at the time when they occurred. The principal gaps in the collection are Departmental Papers (few of

which Lord Samuel retained) and Cabinet Papers which, with a few exceptions, he returned to the Cabinet Office.

The largest series is SAM/A – Herbert Samuel's papers relating to political matters, 1880–1962 (163 files). SAM/A consists of subject files and general political files including a great deal of material relating to the internal affairs of the Liberal Party, and correspondence with such prominent Liberals as Asquith, Herbert Gladstone, Lloyd George, Runciman, Reading, Crewe, Lothian, Lady Oxford, Archibald Sinclair and (overseas) W. L. Mackenzie King. There is also correspondence with Fabians and Labour leaders such as the Webbs, George Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, Ramsay Macdonald, Snowden and Charles Trevelyan. Particularly notable are the files relating to the Marconi Contract (SAM/A/38–9), Irish Affairs 1911–16 (SAM/A/41), the formation of the Coalition Government,