

# LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

## AUTUMN 2010

### Liberal History News

is a new regular feature in the *Journal* (except in special themed issues), reporting news of meetings, conferences, commemorations, dinners or any other events, together with anything else of contemporary interest to our readers. Contributions are very welcome; please keep them reasonably concise, and accompany them, if possible, with photos. Email to the Editor on [journal@liberalhistory.org.uk](mailto:journal@liberalhistory.org.uk)

### Lloyd George book launch at the National Library of Wales

**W**ITH THE Liberal-Conservative coalition government in

J Graham Jones,  
Ffion Hague and  
Dafydd Wigley

Westminster and a National Assembly governing on Welsh soil, there is so much of David Lloyd George's legacy which has prevailed or is reflected in Welsh and British politics today. Dr J Graham Jones, Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales and one of the most prolific contributors to the *Journal of Liberal History*, has now produced a new book, published by the National Library, *Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism*, to illuminate some of the more overlooked aspects of LG's life.

**Graham Lippiatt** was present at the launch.

The book was launched on Saturday 26 June 2010 at the

National Library in Aberystwyth. It was preceded by a lecture by Dr Jones on the marriage of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson. Graham Jones is a fine speaker and at times the lecture seemed to be more of a dramatic presentation, with Dr Jones acting the voices of the key characters when quoting from diaries or letters.

The book was then launched in the company of Ffion Hague, the author of *The Pain and Privilege* (HarperPress, 2008), which itself threw new light on Lloyd George's private affairs. Mrs Hague said she had vowed to put away all her Liberal jokes now that the coalition was in office. Also present was the former



leader of Plaid Cymru and MP for Lloyd George's old seat of Caernarfon Boroughs from 1974 to 2001, Dafydd Wigley, who praised LG's radical and Welsh nationalist heritage.

Dr Jones' book will be reviewed in a future edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* by Professor K. O. Morgan.

### Song for Francis Hirst

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT History Group executive member **Geoffrey Sell** discovered the following extract from the autograph book of his grandmother, Eveline Dora Noble (1889–1971), relating to the candidacy of Francis Hirst for the Sudbury Division in the January 1910 general election.

#### Vote for Hirst

The Liberals are packing  
no energy lacking  
all bent on attacking  
the opposite party

Heads up they are pushing  
and shoving and crashing  
and striving and rushing  
this way to the prize

Our man is Hirst  
the best will be first  
So vote altogether  
For free trade forever.'

The entry was made by Frank Backler, licensee of the Bell Hotel, Haverhill, Suffolk in December 1909. The Hirst referred to was Francis Wrigley Hirst, Liberal candidate for Sudbury in the January 1910 general election. He was defending a seat captured by the Liberals in 1906 but he was unsuccessful.

Jaime Reynolds' article, 'The Last of the Liberals', in *Journal of Liberal History* 47 (summer 2005) provides a full biography of Hirst.

### George Newnes: The Liberal Press Baron

YORK MEMBERSHIP recalls the life of the Liberal-supporting press baron, who died a hundred years ago.

The name George Newnes might be all but forgotten now, but in a way he's the missing link

in the story of British popular journalism. What's more, he was that rare beast – a Liberal-supporting press baron.

Sensing a niche for a publication that would appeal to the newly-literate lower-middle classes, the minister's son in 1881 launched the weekly magazine *Tit-Bits* – 'a compendium of entertaining and amusing stories and tit-bits from all the most interesting books, periodicals and newspapers in the world', in its own words. Unable to raise the capital conventionally, the Derbyshire-born Newnes, who worked in the City after leaving school, funded his new magazine by opening a vegetarian restaurant in Manchester.

His weekly proved an instant hit, and thanks in part to his flair for publicity and quirky prize-reader competitions – one involved the chance to win a seven-bedroom house, provided the winner agreed to call the house 'Tit-Bits Villa' – it would go on to reach a circulation high of 700,000 by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, making it one of the biggest-selling publications in the land.

The title helped revolutionise popular journalism, paving the way for the launch of mass-market papers like the *Daily Mail* (founded by Alfred Harmsworth, a one-time contributor to *Tit-Bits*) and the *Daily Express* (launched by C. Arthur Pearson, who spent five years at *Tit-Bits* after winning a competition to get a job on the magazine). In 1891, Newnes went on to have further success with *Strand Magazine*, which serialised the Sherlock Holmes stories, and soon had a circulation of around half a million.

A lifelong Liberal, in 1885 he became MP for Newmarket, a seat he held until 1895, when he was defeated. However, soon afterwards he was offered the safe Liberal seat of Swansea, which he held from 1900 until his retirement in January 1910. Among his few distinctions as an MP was to be nominated as one of the best-dressed men in the House. However, he served the party in other ways and was valued by Lord Rosebery, among others, for his willingness to bankroll



Sir George Newnes, c 1905

newspapers favourable to the Liberal cause.

In 1893, after W. W. Astor had bought the previously Liberal *Pall Mall Gazette*, and turned it Tory, Newnes founded a new Liberal paper, the *Westminster Gazette*. The 'pea-green incorruptible', as it was dubbed – Gladstone had personally approved its green colour – soon became the heavyweight Liberal paper of the day, even though its circulation never exceeded 25,000. Newnes also launched a 'Liberal' morning penny newspaper, the *Daily Courier*, designed to compete with Harmsworth's new, halfpenny *Daily Mail*; unfortunately it lasted less than six months. Nonetheless, he was duly rewarded for his readiness to bankroll Liberal papers with a baronetcy.

Despite being all but forgotten now, the *Encyclopaedia of the British Press* rightly observes that 'in many ways, George Newnes was the father of the New Journalism: others were to adapt it more successfully, but to him must go the credit for seeing the potential'. It's just a shame that so few press barons have shared his political views.