

be at the centre of a tradition or whether he would be urging us to face the problems of our own world. He noted that Paine's ideas on property are unable to take account of the damage we are doing to the environment. Similarly, the modern world revolves around paper money; rather than inveighing against that we need to focus on the question of who controls that money. Both speakers agreed that Paine would relish the challenges of the modern world.

In answer to a question from Duncan Brack, Vallance explained that however much they refer to his legacy, none of the present political parties could be seen to have been directly influenced by Paine's politics. Royle agreed with this but also noted that the last vestiges of Paine's policies could be seen in Liberal ideas on Land Value Taxation. Richard Grayson also commented that it is the Labour Party which makes the most explicit use of Paine's legacy; however, he felt that this was T-shirt politics and that the party had lost the tradition of referring to the political thought of figures like Paine. Grayson then pushed this point further, asking both of the speakers how plausibly Liberal Democrats could claim the legacy of Paine and also seventeenth century thinkers like Gerard Winstanley. Vallance was absolutely clear that Lib Dems have little common ground with Winstanley. Even by the standards of the seventeenth century, Winstanley was against the separation of political and religious life. His view of a highly interventionist state is also very problematic for Liberals. He did feel however, that Paine's legacy sits more easily within the Liberal than the Socialist tradition, being based on a negative rather than a positive conception of freedom. Professor Royle agreed with this analysis and added that all the political parties search for legitimating ancestors and will attempt to annexe figures like Paine to their political cause.

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The last vestiges of Paine's politics could be seen in Liberal ideas on Land Value Taxation.

REVIEWS

Scarborough politicians

Anne and Paul Bayliss, *Scarborough's MPs 1832 to 1906; Scarborough's Mayors 1836 to 1906; A Biographical Dictionary* (A. M. Bayliss, 2008)

Reviewed by Robert Ingham

THIS SHORT book (114 A5 pages) consists of introductory essays on Scarborough's parliamentary and municipal politics in the nineteenth century, lists of election results and mayors, and biographical essays on each MP and mayor during the period.

Scarborough was a fascinating constituency to which Pelling devotes a page in his *Social Geography of British Elections*. Despite what Pelling describes as the town's 'comfort and respectability' it was a marginal seat, which often bucked the national trend.

Two Whigs were elected in 1832, but in 1835 a Tory, Sir Frederick Trench, topped the poll. An opponent of the 'rash and revolutionary' Great Reform Act, Trench had been first elected as a Cornish MP in 1806. His electioneering included 'bribes, often liquid, dinners and theatres, and he was especially attentive to fishermen and sailors'. Trench remained a Scarborough MP until his retirement in 1847.

The incumbent Whig, Earl Mulgrave, lost a by-election in 1851, necessitated by his appointment as Comptroller of the Household, because he was a supporter of free trade, an unpopular cause in the town. The election was the cause of riots and Mulgrave lost to George Young, a Tory ship-owner with no prior connection with the town. Young, who was defeated by Mulgrave in the 1852 general election, was described by Dickens as a 'prodigious bore' in the House.

One of the most prominent political families in the town was the Johnstone family. Sir John Johnstone served as Whig, and

later Liberal, MP for Scarborough for thirty-three years before retiring in 1874. His place was taken by his son, Sir Harcourt Johnstone, later to become first Baron Derwent. He was, presumably, grandfather of the Harcourt Johnstone who served as a Liberal MP in the 1930s and 1940s, although this is not noted by the authors.

Scarborough became a single-member constituency in 1885, when the seat was surprisingly gained by the Conservative Sir George Sitwell. Described by Pelling as an 'eccentric baronet', Sitwell contrived to lose in 1886, regained it in 1892, but lost again in 1895 and 1900, years when the Conservatives prevailed over the Liberals elsewhere. The Liberal victor in 1886 was Joshua Rowntree, the mayor of the town and a member of the famous Quaker family. Another prominent Liberal MP for Scarborough was Walter Rea, who sat from 1906–18, and was later a minister in the National Government of 1931.

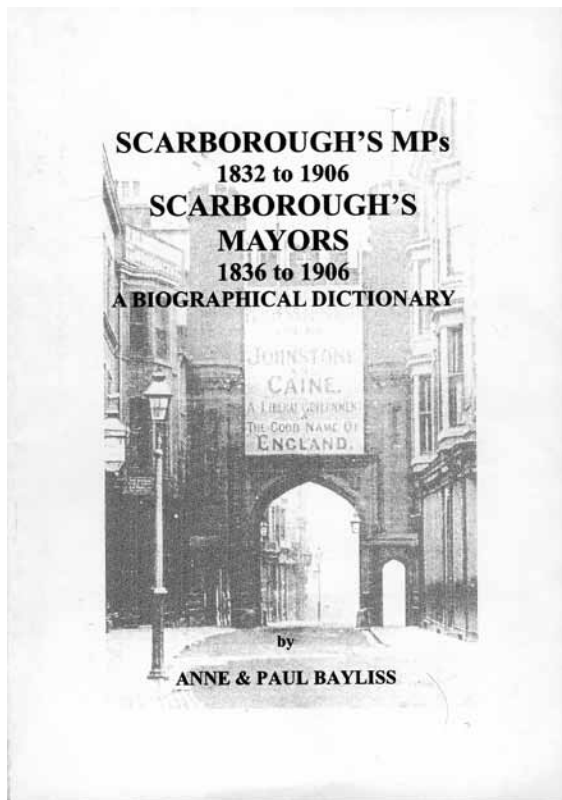
Much of the biographical information in this book is extracted from local newspapers and focuses on the MPs' and mayors' connections with the town. There are few differences in the social backgrounds of Conservatives and Liberals. The landed gentry predominate; there are some Liberal industrialists in the later nineteenth century and a few small tradesmen, but only a handful of the mayors included had a humble background. It would have been useful if the authors could have drawn some general conclusions about the town's political elite, but the introductory essays are very short and relate almost entirely to the

electoral system prior to the Great Reform Act and the municipal reforms of the 1830s.

This points to the main problem with this volume for anyone interested in wider themes in political history than the history of Scarborough: the lack of political context which could be illuminated by the primary material provided by the biographies. The authors do not seem to have consulted Pelling, for example; their local knowledge could usefully have added to his assessment and helped explain Scarborough's political eccentricity. It would have been interesting to know more about how elections were conducted in Scarborough, the party organisations in the town, and links with other institutions such as the churches.

The authors have written a number of biographical dictionaries relating to Scarborough and are clearly performing a valuable service to students of the town's local history. There is some interesting material in this volume for the political historian, principally to indicate questions about politics at the grassroots in the nineteenth century rather than to provide any answers.

Robert Ingham is Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.



Testament of hope

Shirley Williams, *Climbing the Bookshelves* (Virago Press, 2009)

Reviewed by Tom McNally

ONE ALWAYS approaches reviewing the autobiography of a very old friend with a certain trepidation. What if it is awful? How candid a critic can one be without being hurtful? Thankfully Shirley Williams has written a memoir which gives me no such conflict of interests. She has written a kindly book; but one which deals frankly with her own emotions and failures. She also gives a stark reminder of the difficulties for a woman politician in the sexist, male chauvinist world of the 1960s and 1970s.

Like many political biographies, it is her childhood and youth which proves most fascinating to someone already familiar with the political career. Hers was not an orthodox middle-class family life, given her two distinguished academic and politically active parents. In addition it was lived in the shadow and then the reality of the Second World War. I have to confess, however, that, as I read the chapter on childhood and youth, the picture which came in to my mind was that of 'George', the tomboy heroine of Enid Blyton's 'Famous Five' books.

As youth gives way to early womanhood the friendships and love affairs are remembered with due discretion; but with colour and flavour to capture the mood and personalities of post-war Oxford and fifties London.

The book is a useful reminder that public figures have to live their public life whilst surviving all the trials and tribulations which beset the rest of us. Love, marriage, births and bereavements do not work to a politically convenient timetable. Shirley deals with all of these with candour and poignancy which will make the book of interest to those not closely involved in the minutiae of politics.

On a second level, I hope readers of Liberal Democrat

history will find the book of interest in giving a very accurate telling of the story of those who made the often emotional journey from the heart of the Labour Party, via the SDP, to the Liberal Democrats. There is not doubt that, if she had remained in the Labour Party, Shirley Williams would have gone on to hold one of the highest offices of state. Her book, however, is happily free of the 'might have beens'. Although she does concede two errors during the SDP days which made the journey travelled by both the SDP and the Liberals more painful than it might have been.

Her decision not to contest the Warrington by-election in 1981, which she would probably have won, was a major failure of nerve. As she frankly admits, 'My reputation for boldness, acquired in the long fight within the Labour Party, never wholly recovered.' That lack of confidence also revealed itself in her willingness to defer first to Roy Jenkins and then to David Owen in the leadership of the SDP. She is equally candid about this failure: 'Like many women of my generation and of the generation before mine, I thought of myself as not quite good enough for the very highest positions in politics.' That self-deprecation meant that in the 1987 general election the Alliance was 'led' by the uncomfortable Owen/Steel partnership which the electorate sussed as a mismatch long before election day. A more confident and decisive Shirley might have avoided a few of the missed opportunities on the way to the birth of the Liberal Democrats. However, she made, and continues to make, a massive contribution to the work of our party, both in policy development and campaigning. In many ways she reminds me of one of her American heroes, Hubert Humphrey, in her optimism in the political process to find solutions to difficult problems.