

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

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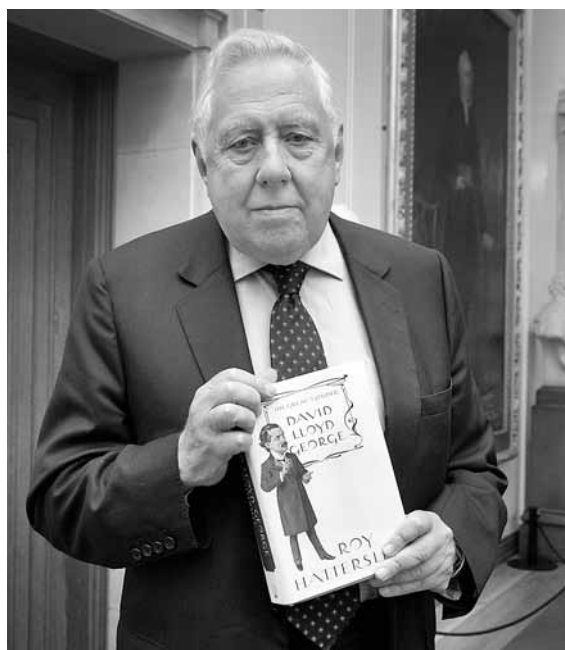
Liberal history news

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

Roy Hattersley lectures at Aberystwyth

THE DRWM at the National Library of Wales was packed on the evening of Thursday 23 September 2010 when Lord (Roy) Hattersley delivered a public lecture on the theme 'Lloyd George: the Great Outsider'.

J. Graham Jones reports.



This was the title of his new 700-page biography of Lloyd George launched at the National Liberal Club in London just a week earlier and published by Little, Brown. Mr Andrew Green, Librarian of the NLW, took the chair at the lecture, and the vote of thanks was delivered by Dr J. Graham Jones, Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the Library.

This is the first substantial single-volume biography of Lloyd George to be published since Peter Rowland's mammoth tome saw the light of day in 1975, and it has been generally well received. During the course of his research and reading for the biography, the author had already spent a period at the NLW in January 2009 making widespread use of the extensive Lloyd George archives and other relevant source materials in the custody of the Library. He had also quarried the Lloyd George Papers deposited at the Parliamentary Archive at the House of Lords.

Lord Hattersley spoke fluently without recourse to notes for about forty minutes to an obviously enthralled audience which clearly warmed to the speaker as he eagerly related many captivating anecdotes about Lloyd George and his family. His political career and complex personal and family life were well covered. Many pertinent questions were asked at the end, and several copies of the book were then purchased in the Library shop.

The biography will be reviewed, by Tomy Greaves, in a future edition of the *Journal of Liberal History*.

Community politics forty years on

AT THE Eastbourne Liberal Assembly in 1970, community politics was officially endorsed as an integral part of the strategy of the Liberal Party. **Graham Lippiatt** reports on a discussion on the topic held at the West Midlands regional conference.

The theoretical foundation of community politics was that Liberals should assist people to take and use power in their own communities. The practical application was that Liberals would produce community newsletters, report back on political activity, work with individuals and community groups, collect petitions and find out what people wanted in their locality through surveys and 'grumble sheets'. This soon led to success in local government elections, pioneered by activists like Sir Trevor Jones ('Jones the Vote') in Liverpool, and laid the foundations for a revival of Liberal fortunes in the aftermath of the poor performance of the 1970 general election.

In 1980, *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics*, written by Bernard Greaves and Gordon Lishman, was published as an Association of Liberal Councillors campaign booklet. The document made the philosophical principles on which community politics was based more widely understood and became a Liberal handbook for local government campaigning.

While community politics has been the jewel in the Liberal crown since 1970 it is always worthwhile revisiting the givens

in politics and to do so, a fringe discussion meeting was organised at the West Midlands Liberal Democrats regional conference on 20 November at Church Street in Shropshire. The meeting examined the background to the adoption of the community politics strategy and considered some of the present-day challenges to community politics as a distinctively Liberal approach. It was delivered in morning and afternoon sessions, chaired by Graham Lippiatt, Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group, and was addressed by Gordon Lishman, joint author of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics* and the person who both drafted the original motion at Eastbourne and summed up in the debate there. The full break-out rooms seemed to enjoy the mixture of debate and nostalgia.

Who killed the *News Chronicle*?

FIFTY YEARS ago after the famous Liberal *News Chronicle* disappeared, **York Membery** reports on its fate.

Few national newspapers can have met so sad and sudden an end as the *News Chronicle*, which ‘died’ fifty years ago, disappearing overnight despite boasting a circulation of over a million – more than many of today’s nationals.

On the morning of October 17, 1960 – ‘Black Monday’ as it would become known – the newspaper, Liberal at heart to the end, appeared as normal. The paper had been losing circulation, and there was speculation about its future. But staff turning up at its offices in Bouverie Street (off Fleet Street) that day were sent out on assignment as usual. As darkness fell, though, fears for its future were brutally realised when it was announced that the paper had been ‘merged’ with the rival *Daily Mail* in a move that sent shock waves throughout Fleet Street and beyond.

The following day the paper’s loyal readers were left wondering what had happened when it failed to appear; the *Mail*’s new-look masthead made its fate clear, stating ‘Incorporating the *News Chronicle*’. Both

Lord Rothermere, the owner of the *Daily Mail*, and Laurence Cadbury, owner of the *News Chronicle*, expressed ‘regret’ at the passing of the paper (along with the *Star*, its London evening sister), reported the *Mail*. But ‘mounting costs and continued losses’ had made it ‘impossible’ for the *Chronicle* to continue as ‘a separate entity’, it claimed, before adding that Cadbury believed the two papers had ‘much in common in the integrity of their reporting and honesty of their outlook’.

Few were taken in by the sugary words and ‘the brutal way in which it was done to death remains one of the darkest chapters in Fleet Street’s murky history,’ says Derek Jameson, the former Fleet Street editor. Just about every national carried an obituary. *The Guardian* said: ‘To write dispassionately about the death of friends is not easy.’ Even the Conservative-supporting *Daily Express* was magnanimous, declaring: ‘Last night a fine newspaper died. Families grew up with the paper: it was their voice. Now that voice is stilled.’

Some titles were particularly critical about the *News Chron*’s choice of ‘saviour’. The *Daily Mirror* called it ‘a shotgun romance – a nuptial ceremony between Like and Unlike, with Dis-like as the best man.’ But it was too late, and Jo Grimond, the Liberal Party leader, could only say hopefully: ‘I trust that the *Daily Mail* will maintain the high standards and liberal outlook associated for so long with the newspaper.’

The Liberal-leaning, if sometimes Labour-supporting (it backed Labour in 1945, 1950 and 1951 but called for a big Liberal vote in 1955 and 1959) *News Chron* had an illustrious past. It was created in 1930 out of the merger of two Liberal-supporting papers, the *Daily News* (1846) – first editor: Charles Dickens – and the *Daily Chronicle* (1855). The *Daily News* had been bought by George Cadbury (the Quaker chocolate-maker) in 1901 to campaign for pensions and against sweated labour. Inheriting the *Daily News*’ radicalism, the *Chron* made its name in the 1930s when it assembled ‘one of the finest staffs known to modern journalism’,

A paper ‘that shouldn’t have died’, in the words of the *Encyclopaedia of the British Press*, met a sad and sorry end, while the Liberal Party was deprived of its last cheerleader in the popular press

as Michael Foot put it, and was at the forefront of the battle against fascism at home and abroad.

By 1960, though, the paper was clearly one of the weaker players in Fleet Street. But despite speculation about its future, the eventual demise of the *Chronicle* (and the *Star*) still came as a bolt from the blue, resulting in 3,500 staff (including 300 journalists) being thrown out of work. There was also anger among staff that Cadbury had sold out to the *Daily Mail* of all papers – the two were chalk and cheese politically.

Fifty years on, it still beggars belief that a newspaper with a circulation of around 1.2 million – selling more than today’s *Times*, *Guardian* and *Independent* combined – could disappear overnight. So who was to blame for its demise?

Within days of Cadbury selling the *News Chron* to Rothermere for £2m, news emerged of other possible suitors, including Sir Christopher Chancellor, chairman of Odhams (which owned the *Daily Herald*), and Lord Beaverbrook. But by then it was too late. The leading Liberal, Jeremy Thorpe, complained that at no time prior to the ‘merger’ had party leaders been told that the paper was likely to close. If it had, he claimed, ‘the necessary money would have been raised’ to save a paper which he and his colleagues believed was ‘vital’ to the Liberal interest.

Some have argued that the *News Chron* was killed off by the print unions and overstaffing. Others blame the management. The truth is that for all the Cadbury family’s support over the years, by 1960 Laurence Cadbury seems to have lost the will to keep it alive, ignoring every circulation-boosting suggestion. ‘He was never committed to the *News Chron* in the way that an earlier generation of Cadburys had been,’ said one former staffer. But whether the *Chron*’s demise was murder or suicide, the result was fatal – and a paper ‘that shouldn’t have died’, in the words of the *Encyclopaedia of the British Press*, met a sad and sorry end, while the Liberal Party was deprived of its last cheerleader in the popular press.