

REVIEWS

reader has some clues as to how Sutton has been so successful for so long, yet little in the way of direct analysis to tease out the lessons that could be applied elsewhere. Having a talented and successful team clearly helped. How much was that luck and how much was it due to measures which could be copied elsewhere?

Moreover, having taken over from a very low-spending Conservative regime, even the increases in spending introduced by the Liberal Democrats left overall spending levels low in many areas compared to other councils. Yet the Liberal Democrat council managed to win widespread public support for the quality of its public services. High-quality popular services despite relatively low spending levels is a combination many Liberal Democrats would like to be able to copy in all sorts of places – including Whitehall! Again there

is a hint of an answer – consult, consult, consult – though I suspect many readers will be left wanting to know more about quite how this combination was pulled off.

Those, however, are topics that can be picked up in training sessions and talks. What the book does, which neither of those can, is to preserve the memories of Sutton Liberal Democrats and many of the thousands of helpers who in their own ways were crucial to it – from running the printing machine through the night through to regularly delivering leaflets in the apparently most unpromising of territory. It makes it a great book to have produced and a very enjoyable one to read.

Dr Mark Pack is co-author of 101 Ways To Win An Election and ran the Liberal Democrats' online campaign for the 2001 and 2005 general elections

red thread which runs through all the chapters. At the time, there was nothing unusual or exceptional about this: very much the same would have been true for liberalism in Britain or indeed anywhere else in Europe or America. However, the challenge which defeated Ulster liberals was that of creating an inclusive notion of the common good which bypassed the philosophical divide and historical animosity between the people belonging to the two Christian confessions. Further tensions within the Protestant camp between Anglicans and Nonconformists (mainly the Presbyterians) compounded the problem.

Although the noun and adjective 'liberal' began to circulate in Ulster from 1809 – significantly, in an appeal for the Protestants to respect the religious feelings of the Catholics – the concepts associated with it were already well-established in late eighteenth-century political debates, particularly in the search for a common ground between the elites of the two communities. At the turn of the century Ulster liberalism was linked to the United Irishmen until the latter started to recruit, besides 'the respectable', also 'the lower orders', in a movement which looked increasingly

Liberals in Ulster

Gerald R. Hall, *Ulster Liberalism 1778–1876* (Four Courts Press, 2011)

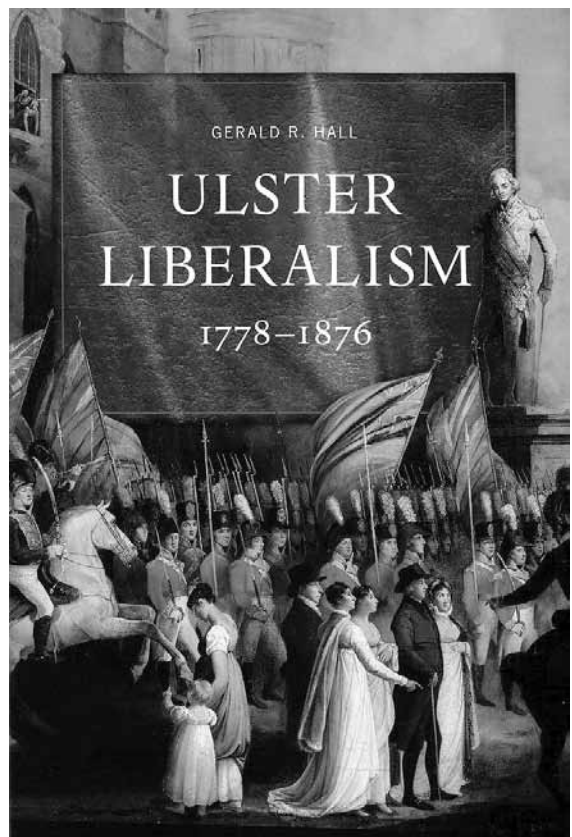
Reviewed by **Eugenio F Biagini**

THE CIVIL STRIFE and social polarisation which characterised the 'Troubles' from 1968 to 1998 and beyond – and indeed the whole of the past century since the Solemn League and Covenant to resist home rule in 1912 – have for a long time obscured the extent to which, during the previous one hundred years Ulster had been the hub of reform politics and various shades of liberalism. Only recently has there been a rediscovery of this dimension, which was first examined in John Bew's ground-breaking *The Glory of Being Britons: Civic Unionism in 19th Century Belfast* (Dublin, 2008) and the important volume reviewed here.

Like Bew (whom, surprisingly, he does not cite), Hall aims at recovering an Ulster political tradition in which neither nationalism nor unionism were of primary importance, and which sought to relegate religious differences to a self-contained private sphere

outside politics. This tradition was rooted in the Enlightenment and its legacy. When the latter began to be undermined – by Romanticism and its concomitants, religious and nationalist revivalism – Ulster liberalism started to wither, but its defenders did not give up. As the author notes, '[m]uch of the tension and the drama of this story derives from the struggle of men and women to maintain their principles despite changing circumstances' (p. 11).

Hall examines the causes which led to the rise and fall of Ulster liberalism in four substantial chapters with a broadly chronological structure. The first deals with the 'forging' of Ulster liberalism. The second and third examine its growth and consolidation, focusing on the concept of public opinion and economic affairs, and finally (chapter 4) its crisis and decline from 1868. Religion – as a source of inspiration but also of sectarian division – represents a



like a conspiracy, and actually became one in the run-up to 1798. The rising was a disaster for Ulster liberals, because it renewed the sectarian polarisation which was so antithetical to whatever they stood for, and because it resulted – like the French revolution – in a bloody civil war.

From 1801 the Union provided a new chance to recast Irish politics into a different mould, with many hoping that Westminster would foster the wider sympathies and allegiances, but a twenty-nine-year delay in introducing Catholic emancipation poisoned the relationship between the communities and paved the way for the rise of Daniel O’Connell. This was bad news for the liberals, whose electoral support depended – then as, indeed, ever since – on bridging the sectarian gap and building an alliance between the open-minded people of both communities, one focusing on economic and social concerns rather than theological divides (p. 96). As the century went on, liberals discovered that this could best be done by taking up issues such as land reform and tenant rights, to which both Protestant and Catholic farmers were increasingly responsive. In this respect Hall’s decision to end his book in 1868 or 1876 is strange, for Ulster liberals experienced a major revival – linked to their land reform campaign – in 1880. Later, those Ulster liberals who adopted radical land reform proposals were the only ones who prospered – as illustrated by the career of T. W. Russell, the Liberal MP for South Tyrone for about thirty years until 1918, during which he stood as a Liberal, a Liberal Unionist and a Liberal again, but always as a radical agrarian reformer.

Beautifully produced and effectively marketed by Four Courts, this book is a major addition to the scholarly literature and to the debate on a less well-known, but nonetheless significant, alternative tradition in Irish politics.

Eugenio F. Biagini is Reader in Modern History at Cambridge and a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College; he is also the Reviews Editor of the Journal of Liberal History. He has published extensively on the history of Liberalism in Britain, Ireland and Italy.

Online reviews

Introduction to *Reviews in History* for *Journal of Liberal History* readers

by **Danny Millum**

REVIEWS IN HISTORY (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>), founded in 1996, is a freely-accessible online-only journal published by the Institute of Historical Research and featuring reviews of books and digital resources. Coverage extends to all geographical areas and types of history, and its chronological scope extends back to AD 500.

Its aim has always been to review major recently published works of history in a serious and scholarly way, and at greater speed and fuller length than in most printed journals. The online format, of course, is perfect for this, allowing us to commission pieces of 2,000 to 3,000 words and publish them immediately, without the constraints of typesetting or fixed publication dates which affect a printed journal. A further unique feature is the right of reply afforded to authors, taken up by many, through which *Reviews* hopes to encourage constructive discussion and debate.

The commissioning process relies on a combination of suggestions by academics, recommendations by our Editorial Board and the careful perusal of publishers’ catalogues, and this currently produces four new reviews every week, with over 1,400 having now been published.

Although the scope of *Reviews* is wide, there is, reflecting publishing trends, a great deal of material that may appeal to students of British Liberal history, and political history in general. The website features a fully-faceted search function, so it is possible very quickly to limit the reviews to, say, British and Irish political history from the twentieth century (<http://bit.ly/U4wzHj>). This then produces 114 reviews (at the time this article was written!) which can be browsed, or further filtered by keyword (e.g. ‘liberal’).

Glancing through these, your eye might be drawn first to a recent review by Jason Peacey (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/>

[review/1267](http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1267)) of *The History of Parliament Online*, a good example of a classic resource for political historians now being transformed by digital technology. Such resources are now proliferating, but it is often harder to find in-depth objective reviews for something like this than it would be for the equivalent book, and this gap is one which *Reviews* has striven hard to fill, both in terms of coverage and also in providing would-be reviewers with guidance as to the criteria to apply to such resources. This piece has also elicited a response (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1267#author-response>) from the editor of the project, and this is a good example of how this feature allows questions raised in the initial review to be answered by those most qualified to do so.

In terms of books we have covered which are more specifically geared to liberal politics, and the Liberal Party, a nice example would be this piece (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/661>) by Helen McCarthy on *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate*, edited by Duncan Tanner and Ewen Green. The book’s title draws on George Dangerfield’s 1935 classic *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, and the longer format allows the reviewer to explore this, and to fully site the collection in the historiography inspired by Dangerfield’s polarisation thesis. Once again, there is a significant response from the editors, tackling in detail the issues and criticisms raised in the original piece.

For those interested in other reviews surrounding the rise of Labour and eclipse of the Liberals in the first half of the twentieth century, see Laura Beers (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/985>) on *Parties and People, England 1914–1951* by Ross McKibbin. Turning back to the era of Liberal ascendancy, we unsurprisingly find a number of reviews of works taking a variety of different perspectives