

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

SPRING 2014

Obituary: Marion Thorpe CBE (1926–2014)

Marion Thorpe, the second wife of Jeremy Thorpe, the former Leader of the Liberal Party, died on 6 March 2014. She was 87.

Marion Stein was born in Austria at 13 Momsengasse, Vienna 4, on 18 October 1926. Her Jewish father, Erwin Stein, had been a musician and was then a conductor at the Darmstadt Theatre. Mrs Stein, her mother, was formerly Sofie Backmann, a Christian clergyman's daughter.

The family fled to London in 1938, when the Nazis marched into Austria. When she arrived in London, Marion knew very little English. She attended Kensington High School and rapidly became a star pupil, winning prizes for English and music, and ending up as a school prefect. At 18, she left school to study music at the Royal College of Music. To help with the family income, she started giving piano lessons and also gave recitals at musical soirees and concerts.

Through her father, who had taken a senior position at the musical publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, Marion met all the top musicians and composers of the day at the family flat. It was in a good location, off Kensington High Street, near to Leighton House, on a corner, at 22 Melbury Road. It was there that she formed a very close and lifelong friendship with Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. She helped them set up the Aldeburgh Festival just after the Second World War.

In 1948, at the Aldeburgh Festival, she met and fell in love with George Lascelles, 7th Earl of Harewood (1923–2011), owner of the splendid stately home, Harewood House. George was the eldest son of

the 6th Earl (1882–1947) and his wife, Her Royal Highness the Princess Mary, later the Princess Royal (1897–1965); King George V's only daughter, she was a sister of King George VI and an aunt of our present Queen.

Despite objections by Queen Mary (Marion was half Jewish and her brother fought on the German side in the war) the couple married in 1949. Queen Mary duly attended the wedding, along with all the other members of the Royal Family, apart from Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent, who decided to absent herself – though not with her three children, who all attended – with an entirely unconvincing excuse of having to go abroad because of a previously arranged holiday.

Marion and George Harewood went on to have three sons. After ten years of marriage, the relationship started to fray. In 1967, Marion successfully petitioned for divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery with Patricia Tuckwell (a musician, who had given birth to Harewood's illegitimate son, Mark Lascelles, in 1964; she became Harewood's second wife in 1967). The divorce cost Lord Harewood a fortune, and he was forced to sell a Titian, along with other objets d'art from the Harewood House collection, in the late 1960s. And what was far worse, as Harewood later recalled, his close friends Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears took Marion's side, broke off their long friendship with him and refused to speak to him ever again. Such was Marion's personality that many years after his divorce from her, Harewood stated that he 'still loved Marion', whose

background he once described as 'Jewish and sophisticated'.

In 1973, Marion married Jeremy Thorpe, who had been Leader of the Liberal Party since 1967. His first wife, Caroline Allpass, had been killed in a car crash in 1970, leaving Thorpe with a young son to bring up. In 1975, two years after his marriage to Marion, rumours and allegations began to emerge about Thorpe's relationship, fifteen years earlier, with Norman Scott, a former male model. Scott's allegation that Thorpe had attempted to have him murdered led to Thorpe appearing at the Old Bailey on a murder charge in 1979.

Although Thorpe was acquitted, a large amount of Marion's capital from her divorce settlement was spent on Thorpe's enormous legal fees; even some of her jewellery was sold off to support Jeremy in his legal battle to defend himself against a Crown prosecution.

Two years after the trial, Thorpe developed Parkinson's Disease, which has become steadily worse as the years have progressed.

Despite Thorpe's murder trial and his serious health problems, Marion's second marriage was a very happy and successful one. The couple always made the big decisions in their lives together, after much calm discussion. The last decision they made was a particularly painful one for both of them, as they decided to sell their country retreat in Devon to raise badly needed money – roughly half a million pounds – to provide for their rising care costs.

The Thorpes' London home was at 2 Orme Square, Bayswater. The house, a large one at

the end of a row, was given to Marion by George Harewood as part of her divorce settlement in 1967. Marion's second son, James Lascelles, also has a flat in the building.

In 2008 Marion Thorpe was appointed CBE for services to music. She founded the Leeds International Piano Competition, with Fanny Waterman, in 1961. Her favourite composer was Mahler. She still loved to play the piano, even in old age, while Jeremy's favourite musical instrument was always the violin.

Her husband, Jeremy, along with his son from his first marriage, Rupert (Marion's stepson) and her three sons from her first marriage to Lord Harewood survive her.

I have very fond memories of two excellent parties the Thorpes threw at the National Liberal Club. The first, in 1999, was in the David Lloyd George room to celebrate the launch of Jeremy's autobiography *In My Own Time*. The second party took place just a few years ago, in the Smoking Room, to mark Jeremy's 80th birthday. The champagne flowed all evening, and I can see them both now, in separate wheelchairs, but 'parked' close together, holding hands and smiling.

Ronald Porter

Rescuing Jews from Nazis

The History Group has received a query about the occasion in January 1943 on which the Liberal Party Executive wrote to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, with a 'Five-point Programme on Rescue of Jews from Nazis'. Our enquirer is interested in obtaining a copy of the original memorandum.



Research on the web (<http://www.jta.org/1943/01/24/archive/liberal-party-sends-churchill-five-point-program-on-rescue-of-jews-from-nazis>) suggests that this memorandum was indeed sent.

The Times of 28 January 1943 carries a short report on

the party executive's discussion on the issue, though there is no mention of a memo or any contact with Churchill.

We have been unable to find any further information. Any reader of the *Journal* who would be able to help further is very welcome to contact the

Editor (see contact details on page 3).

Apology

We would like to apologise for the late despatch of this issue of the *Journal of Liberal History* – it went to press about

six weeks later than originally planned.

We will aim to catch up with the summer issue, a special issue on the first twenty-five years of the Liberal Democrats, 1988–2013 (due out in late July) and the autumn issue (late September).

On This Day ...

Every day the Liberal Democrat History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three of them. To see them regularly, look at www.liberalhistory.org.uk or www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup or follow us at: **LibHistoryToday**.

March

1 March 1894: Gladstone chairs the last of his 556 Cabinets as Prime Minister. Although Gladstone described it in his diary as 'a very moving scene', he always after referred to it as the 'blubbing Cabinet'. Looking back thirty years later, Herbert Asquith wrote, 'Before the Cabinet separated Lord Kimberley ... who was genuinely moved had uttered a few broken sentences of affection and reverence, when Harcourt produced from his box and proceeded to read a well-thumbed manuscript of highly elaborate eulogy. Of those who were present there are now few survivors but which of them can forget the expression on Mr Gladstone's face, as he looked on with hooded eyes and tightened lips at this maladroit performance?'

April

22 April 1902: Birth of Lady Megan Lloyd George, the youngest child of Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George. The first female MP for a Welsh seat, she was Liberal MP for Anglesey 1929–51 and was Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party 1949–51. She was devastated to lose her parliamentary seat and felt the radical tradition in Welsh politics had passed to the Labour Party. She joined Labour and represented Carmarthen from 1957 until her death in 1966.

May

16 May 2010: Liberal Democrat Special Conference in Birmingham approves the coalition agreement with the Conservatives, paving the way for the Coalition Government.

20 May 1798: Radical Whig Charles James Fox, speaking to Whigs at Freemason's Tavern, provokes the ire of his Tory arch-rival William Pitt the Younger, as well as his dismissal from the Privy Council, with a toast to 'Our Sovereign Majesty, the people'.