

Violet asked to marry him hours before he died. From then on, for some four years, Violet's diary was written as a letter to her late fiancé. In memory of Archie Gordon, she set up a boys' club in Hoxton, which she ran successfully for several years. She was helped by Mark Bonham Carter (known as Bongie), her father's Private Secretary, who throughout the period played the role of dependable friend of last resort. Violet and her friend Venetia Stanley joked that Bongie resembled Gabriel Oak from Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. By 1914, Bongie's warm letters addressed Violet in the same way as she addressed her diary to Archie Gordon. Their marriage, after a brief courtship, is covered in the second volume of diaries.

Of Violet's uneasy relationship with her stepmother, Margot, there is precious little. Her father is the subject of several uncritical appreciations. Their relationship was very close and warm, although not sufficiently close for Violet to detect that H. H. Asquith was a close confidante of Venetia Stanley at this time. There is not a sniff of this scandal, although it shocked Violet to the core when it was finally revealed in the 1960s. Relations with Lloyd George were not, at this time, particularly strained, although Violet records that she 'heaved' over one of his populist speeches on Lords reform in 1910.

After 1909, with Violet 'out' in society and mourning Archie Gordon, politics featured more prominently in her life. She gave vivid accounts of the 1909 Budget, the 1910 elections and the Marconi affair. Her robust views on the suffragettes and their cause are given vent on several occasions: had she been sympathetic to them, might she have persuaded her father to change his mind? It is interesting to note, too, how rowdy was the House of Commons at that time, with uproar far worse than anything experienced in recent times. Interestingly, in a

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conversation about the prospect of a 1915 general election, H. H. Asquith threatens that similar tactics would be employed by the Liberals against the Conservatives over Irish Home Rule, should the Liberals be defeated. 'Imagine, Winston and Lloyd George unmuzzled,' ponders the Liberal leader.

Violet herself was more than just a commentator at this time. She was active in the Liberal Social Council, visiting 'distant' Palmers Green and Harlesden to speak for the cause. She spoke regularly in public in support of the government and found she enjoyed it. There were also opportunities for foreign travel. With her father, she took a cruise with the Churchills on the Admiralty yacht *Enchantress*. While he was away, the Prime Minister missed some serious industrial action by the dockworkers and the resignation of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Loreburn. Even the normally calm Bongie was reduced to sending fevered telegrams reminding the Prime Minister of the dangers of leaving the government rudderless at such a sensitive time. Violet also visited her brother Arthur in the Sudan, where she rejected the advances of Bongie's older brother Edgar, and travelled to the United States and Canada,

where she dined with Theodore Roosevelt amongst others.

This first volume of the diaries ends with some correspondence with a vivacious Rupert Brooke, a sign of the horrors to come. The second volume of Violet's diaries are more fragmented, although the first sections chronicle the downfall of the society into which Violet was born. In the third volume, Violet is captured as an ageing member of the great and the good, on an endless treadmill of committee meetings, and a giant amongst pygmies in her own party. *Lantern Slides* is the best of the lot, and unmissable for students of the Edwardian era and its politics.

A word should be said for the editing. Violet's son Mark initiated the project but died shortly before publication. Mark Pottle assisted with *Lantern Slides* and then edited the other two volumes outright. They did a splendid job, not just in terms of allowing Violet to speak out, in her own words, and at her own sometimes breathless pace, but in providing detailed, helpful footnotes and appendices on the people and places mentioned.

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REPORT

Liberal Heroines

Fringe meeting report, March 2003, with Baroness (Liz) Barker and Diana Wallis MEP

Report by **Justine McGuinness**

Once again the History Group provided the most lively and simulating

fringe event at Conference. The reason was simple: an interesting subject and very passionate

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speakers, who succeeded, where others so often fail, in 'firing up' their audience. Indeed, so enthused were the audience that the meeting did not really end. Rather we had to be thrown out of the room and the discussion continued in the corridors and bar of the Grand Hotel.

First up was Liz Barker, with a formidable and inspiring selection of women. Baroness Barker first focused on Harriet Taylor (née Hardy), otherwise known as Mrs John Stuart Mill. Then, to the surprise and enjoyment of the audience, she turned to Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (from the introduction everyone thought it was going to be Hilary Rodham Clinton) and finished with possibly the strongest candidate, Rosa Parks.

Through her work and her relationship with Mill, Harriet Taylor was an impressive agent for change, and it is this, together with her passion for equality, that clearly qualifies her to be a 'liberal heroine'. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill met each other in 1830 at a dinner party, while she was still married to John Taylor, a wealthy businessman who helped found the Reform Club and London University. Their relationship developed but, as Liz commented, speculation about that is 'irrelevant because what is evidenced in his writing and in hers is that they were two people who adored each other as equals.'

During the 1840s, Taylor and Mill withdrew from London society and worked together on *Principles of Political Economy*. Two years after the death of John Taylor in 1849, Mill and Taylor did marry but only after a declaration by Mill recognising Harriet's freedom and property rights, rights not recognised by British society at that time. So low key was the wedding that even Mill's brother did not know about it for some time.

They were a happy couple who shared everything, especially his work. Together they

formulated some of the most important ideas on discrimination and equality, ideas that have changed the lives of women ever since. Liz Barker highlighted the 'Enfranchisement of Women', published in the *Westminster Review* in 1851, as the work that best sets out the collaboration between Mill's analytical powers and Taylor's more emotional approach to philosophy. However, as Barker pointed out, surviving essays show that Harriet held more radical views than her second husband and was more attracted to the socialist views expressed by people such as Robert Owen.

Liz's second heroine, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, was the wife of one of the world's most famous men, her cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They married in 1905 and at the time Eleanor had no objectives other than to be a supportive wife and mother. However, her aspirations changed over time. As her husband's political career progressed, she expanded her circle of women friends, from the progressive, liberal reformers she and Franklin knew to women in organised labour organisations. Eleanor's lifelong interests such as education and economic justice began to take practical shape. By the end of World War One she had joined the board of the NY State League of Women Voters and become an active campaigner for the civil rights agenda of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

As a teacher, campaigner and writer, Eleanor pursued her own course without ever undermining FDR's position, even when they disagreed. Throughout the Depression she worked tirelessly on behalf of working women and people trapped in ghettos and unsanitary housing. Some of her words from that period still resonate today. In 1932, for example, she said that there was a need for 'something more

than the temporary alleviation of suffering through emergency aid or charity. It is nice to hand out milk or bread. It gives you a comfortable feeling inside. We need new and bold solutions.'

Liz told the meeting that Eleanor Roosevelt showed her ability to bring about bold solutions when she directed the construction of a model community in West Virginia during the New Deal era. Indeed, throughout that time she was Franklin's eyes and ears, travelling the country to see the New Deal in practice.

During their time in the White House, she published six books, wrote countless articles, started women-only press briefings with women reporters and courted controversy over what we would call human rights issues. Even after her husband's death in 1945 she remained a formidable power broker within the Democratic Party. As Liz put it: 'A fine lady who influenced a fine man'. What a tribute!

Liz Barker concluded with a woman who did not make speeches or write articles, but rather was known for one thing only. After a hard day's work in December 1955, Rosa Parks sat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama and refused to move to the back to make way for a white person. Liz described this as a 'quiet act of dignified defiance against prejudice'. An act that surely elevates her to 'heroine', and clearly a liberal one at that – and one from which modern liberal democrats can take inspiration.

All three women had a passionate hatred of injustice, which was rooted in the experience of people around them. Each challenged the codes of the society in which she lived. Each started without a platform and created one and, in so doing, brought about change for others. Liz ended with a timely reminder that, at this particular time when the actions of the current American administration make any liberal 'despair', the USA has

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nevertheless been a place where 'great and inspiring things have happened for women and for liberty'.

Diana Wallis MEP stood in at the last minute and delivered an excellent speech. Her first nomination for heroine status was Anne Carter, a woman often in trouble, who lived in Essex in the 1620s. While her motives may be questioned, Anne led a group of men in a raid on a ship following the introduction of a grain tax. One could argue that it was an example of direct action by a group of desperate, hungry people fighting for the good of the local community against central government. Unfortunately, the powers of the day did not see it like that. Anne was captured and hanged for her part in the civil unrest.

Ms Wallis also nominated (though she is still alive) Mary Robinson, a woman who, in Diana Wallis's words, 'rocked the system' and had a tremendous impact on Irish society. Robinson was the first woman President of Ireland and used her presidency for the good of all people in Eire, not just the ones who had voted for her. Diana argued with force that Mary Robinson's impressive record on human rights means she is a liberal heroine, whatever her party label.

Members of the audience then offered nominations for liberal heroine status. Harriet Smith suggested Enid Lakeman for her work on electoral reform, while Sue Vincent offered Caroline Norton (granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan) who lived in a era where women's voices counted for nothing, yet campaigned for property rights for women. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was offered as a heroine for her groundbreaking work on women's health. Others suggested included Marie Stopes, Josephine Butler, Emily Hobhouse, Octavia Hill and Helen Suzman.

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As the meeting closed, despite there being no end to the discussion, a clear call came from the audience that the History Group should look at running a special *Journal* issue focused on heroines. Judging from the questions at this fringe, there is much debate to be had about what a liberal heroine is and how to define heroism. Does she have to be dead? Or could she be alive and still working for political change, such as Shirley Williams? And clearly there is a considerable amount of material to consider.

Several members of the audience spoke with warmth and affection about Baroness (Nancy) Seear. William Wallace reminded us of her support for the party through the bad as well as the good years. Liz Baker, in replying, said that Nancy had once offered advice to Sally Hamwee about attending political meetings: 'Always go if there is food'. There was no food at this meeting, but I feel sure that Nancy would have come for the intellectual feast. I look forward to seeing what the History Group serves up at the next conference!

ARCHIVES

Liberalism in Dundee

by Iain Flett

Although not a source immediately apparent as pertaining to Liberalism, the sixteenth century wooden-boarded register of burgesses or freemen of Dundee, known as *The Lockit Buik* (Locked Book) contains entries of interest to Liberal historians. George, later Baron, Armitstead, was made a burgess in 1854 not in his own right, but by right of his wife Jane, who was daughter of Edward Baxter of Kincaldrum. He was one of the very few who was later entered again in his own right as an honorary burgess in 1904 'in recognition of his long commercial connection with Dundee and his generous liberality to the Charitable and Benevolent Institutions of the City'.

There are also entries for the following figureheads:

Rt Hon Sir George Otto Trevelyan, Bart., HM Sec of State for Scotland, in connection with his support for Dundee's constitution as a County of City, 1894.

Sir John Leng, printer, publisher and MP for Dundee, 1902.

Rt Hon Herbert Henry Asquith, Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury, 1912.

Rt Hon David Lloyd George MP, Prime Minister 'especially to his services in connection with the Great World War now raging', 1917.

Sir Garnet Wilson 'in recognition of his long, distinguished and useful career as a member of the Town Council of Dundee ...', 1971.

In addition to this, there is an amusing and unusual cartoon of Dingle McIntosh Foot on the Friends of Dundee City Archives website index to their Poor