

ARCHIVES

Liberal History Archives at Manchester Archives and Local Studies

by **Debbie Cannon**

Manchester is famous as a cradle of political liberalism in the early nineteenth century, and many of the better-known materials in Manchester Archives reflect the city's radical reputation: the papers of George Wilson, and J. B. Smith, for example, as well as the journal of Henry Hunt, and the memoirs and diaries of Samuel Bamford. However, both less well-known and less well-used are those archives produced by, and related to, the Liberal Party in Manchester held in Manchester Archives and Local Studies, dating from the nineteenth century up to the previous few decades. This review aims to provide a focus on some of these resources.

At the core of our collections are the records of the Manchester Liberal Federation, the organisation which went on to become the City of Manchester Liberal Party. From the central organisation of the party, we hold minutes from the General Council, the Manchester Central Liberal Registration Committee, the Finance Committee, and other committees, covering various periods between 1878 and 1965, as well as an incomplete series of accounts from between 1898 and 1946. The collection also incorporates minutes and/or accounts from several divisional associations, including political wards and the Manchester Women's Central Council, variously dating between 1919 and 1950. The catalogue for this collection (reference M283) can now be viewed in full on the internet as part of the 'Access to Archives' initiative, at the web-site www.a2a.pro.gov.uk

The Library holds collections from three other main Liberal organisations in the area: the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Liberal Federation (reference M390), the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Derbyshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations (reference M391/1), and the Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents, Lancashire and Cheshire (later North Western) District (reference M392). Again the records largely consist of minutes and accounts. The Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Liberal Federation later evolved into the North West Liberal Federation, and then the Greater Manchester Liberal Party; as well as minutes from the Executive Committee Meetings (1908–69), and accounts covering 1959–62, and 1967–71, the records include a list of officers from 1938–53. From the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Derbyshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations, we hold minutes of committee meetings, AGMs, and spring conferences. Finally, the records of the Certified and Associated Liberal Agents, Lancashire and Cheshire District, encompass executive meeting minutes from 1903–51, and accounts from 1918–49. The catalogues for these collections are as yet not available on the internet, but paper versions can be viewed in the archive search-room whenever the Library is open.

In a series of deposits between 1961 and 1987, the Library was given the papers of Ernest Darwin Simon, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe (reference M11), who served as the Liberal MP for

Wythenshawe in 1923–24, and 1929–31, before switching his allegiance to the Labour Party in 1946. Born in Didsbury in 1879, Lord Simon studied engineering at Cambridge, taking over the running of his family's firms at the age of twenty. He married Sheena Potter in 1912, and the couple shared a passionate concern for social reform. Both served as city councillors and Lord Simon became the city's youngest Lord Mayor in 1921. Lord Simon's primary interests were in smoke abatement and housing, and the writings which he produced on the clearing of slum housing, and rebuilding of city dwellings, were very influential on government. In the 1930s he took practical steps towards improving housing in the city, purchasing Wythenshawe Hall and Park and gifting the estate to the city, enabling the suburb of Wythenshawe to be established. He was also very concerned with 'education for citizenship', the teaching of civic responsibility in schools to produce good citizens. In 1932 he was knighted, and from 1947 until 1952 he served as Chairman of the BBC.

The papers are to a large extent concerned with Lord Simon's interest in education, and in particular his involvement with the University of Manchester, for which he created research fellowships in the social sciences, and acted as Chairman in Council from 1941–57. However, his files, arranged by subject, include letters, notes, and documents displaying the diversity of his interests and activities. Topics include nationalised boards, nuclear disarmament, town planning, the USA, 'education for citizenship', and local government, as well as personal interview files. His diaries for various years between 1907 and 1944 are also available, together with extracts from his diaries from 1918–27 and 1929–35 transcribed by Lady Simon.

In 1961 and 1979 the Library was again fortunate in receiving deposits of the papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe

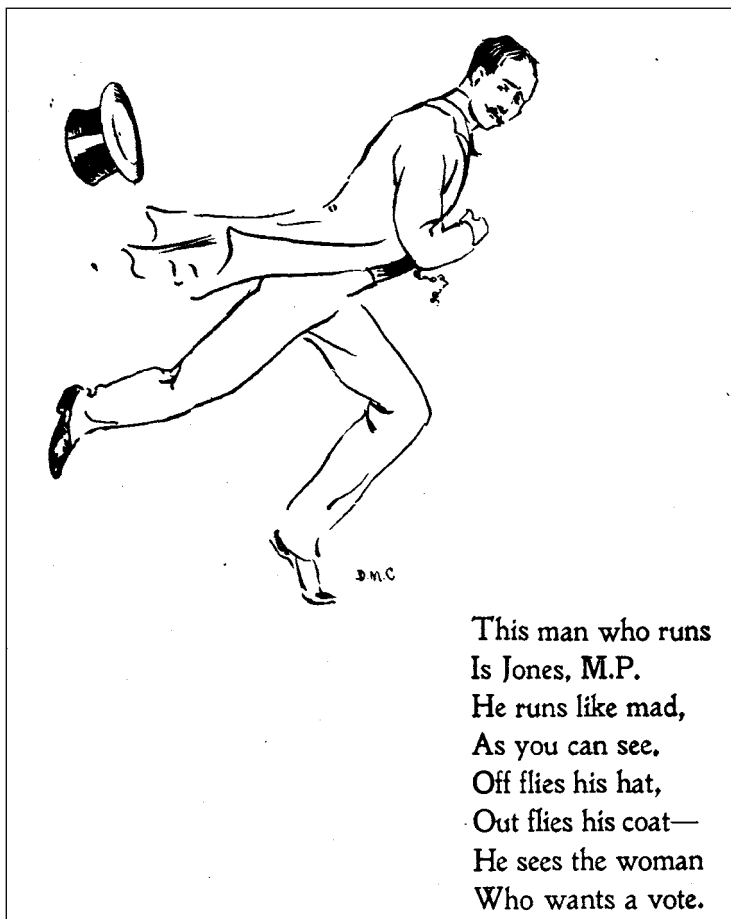
(reference M14). The collection similarly encompasses a wide range of subjects. As well as personal diaries, papers, and family photographs, Lady Simon's lifelong interest in education is strongly represented, together with the planning of the Wythenshawe estate.

Single items within other large collections will also prove of interest to researchers of Liberal history. The Women's Suffrage collection (reference M50), is one such example. This collection is made up of the archive of the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage and the personal papers of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and includes a number of items relating to the Women's Liberal Association, and the Women's Liberal Federation, and others simply reflecting attitudes amongst members of the Liberal Party to women's suffrage. Part of the catalogue to this collection has been put on the 'Access to Archives' web-site, and the whole collection has been microfilmed. Copies of the films can be consulted in the archive searchroom.

The papers of the Cobden family (references M87, and Misc./767/1-4), which cover the years 1817-87, incorporate papers relating to Richard Cobden's early business activity, and his political career, and include material concerning his relations with the Liberal Party. John Bright's correspondence (reference MS f 923.2 Br 13), dating from 1852-88, similarly includes letters which describe his dealings with the Liberal Party. Researchers can track other individual records relating to the Liberal Party in the subject index and catalogues in the archive searchroom. These include records such as a circular and subscription list for the South Manchester Liberal Association, dated in 1912, and a series of pamphlets describing meetings of the Manchester Liberal Federation from 1905-12.

Published material of local historical interest (including newspapers, and in many cases

Illustration from the Women's Suffrage collection; library reference M50/2/28.



**This man who runs
Is Jones, M.P.
He runs like mad,
As you can see,
Off flies his hat,
Out flies his coat—
He sees the woman
Who wants a vote.**

annual reports, as well as secondary literature) is held by the Local Studies Section of the Library. This is located immediately next to the archive searchroom, but has different opening times, as well as its own indexes. Over the years local press cuttings have been compiled on the Liberal Party, the Manchester Liberal Federation, and Liberal Clubs, and these are supplemented by official handbooks, annual reports, and formulations of policy, dating variously from the 1890s up to the present day. Local newspapers, including the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Mercury*, can be viewed on microfilm in the Library's Microfilm Unit during normal Library opening hours. A full list of these, with dates covered, is provided on our website.

All of the above archive collections have been catalogued, and are open to researchers. Archives opening hours (different from the rest of the Library) are Monday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., and further

information on access requirements, and arranging a visit can be found on our website at www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries/arl Some of the collections listed are held in an out-store, so we require researchers to give us at least twenty-four hours notice if they would like to view them.

Prospective researchers should write, telephone or email Manchester Archives, Central Library, St Peter's Square, Manchester, M2 5PD, telephone 0161 234 1980, email archives@libraries.manchester.gov.uk

At the time this article was written, Dr Debbie Cannon was Archivist, Manchester Archives and Local Studies.