

ARCHIVES

'The radicals and thinkers of British politics?'¹

Sources in the Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland for the study of the Liberals and Liberal Democrats*

by Alan R Bell

When Paddy Ashdown suggested that Jo Grimond had been able to establish the Liberal Party as the party of the 'radicals and thinkers of British politics' he was praising the man who had begun to turn the fortunes of an ailing party around. Grimond himself had asserted that the Liberals had to be more than 'a brains trust standing on the sidelines of politics shouting advice to the Tories and Socialists alike', and had worked extensively to make the party modernise; in his mind it was 'a question of get on or get out'.²

To the readers of this journal this may seem like old information. However, it is impossible to test the assertions of Ashdown and Grimond without the manuscript sources that are held in repositories around the country. How does the scholar decide whether Liberal policies are either radical or thoughtful without testing their evolution by returning to the documents that the party, its branches, and its members have left behind?

The Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland has a particularly rich group of collections relating to the Liberal Party and its politicians, and the holdings here represent the best starting point for the scholar of Scottish Liberal history. The earliest accession of party material was in 1978 when the library purchased an agenda book and some minute books of the Scottish Liberal Club (1936–53). This

purchase was augmented the following month by the formal deposit of the papers of the Scottish Liberal Club (1879–1953), helping to establish a very good run of records for that body in one institution.

The accession of the records of the Scottish Liberal Party proper took place in 1999. Through the good offices of the Secretary of the Scottish Working People's History Trust, the Scottish Liberal Democrats took the decision to deposit their archive with the Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland. This decision meant that the records of the Liberal Party would be properly represented in the collection of Modern Political Manuscripts in the Library, allowing researchers to access the archives of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association, the Scottish National Party, the Scottish Liberal Party, and the finest collection of labour and trade union records in Scotland, in the same place.³ The decision to deposit the party archive in the National Library of Scotland was taken in conjunction with the Sub-Librarian (Special Collections) at Edinburgh University Library. Although an earlier deposit of Scottish Liberal Party papers had been made to that institution, it was felt that that the party archive would be more appropriately housed as part of the Modern Political Manuscript collection at the National Library of Scotland. The papers of the other parties provided a

context for the Scottish Liberal papers, and, moreover, the National Library of Scotland already had extensive holdings of the personal papers of many Liberal politicians (of which more below). Therefore, the entire collection, comprising the material previously at Edinburgh University Library and further material from the headquarters of the Scottish Liberal Democrats at Clifton Terrace in Edinburgh, was brought to the National Library and a potential split in the archive was avoided.

The collection of Scottish Liberal Party papers is a particularly fine one, covering the whole range of party organisation and administration for the period of the manuscripts (1877–1959). The main run of minutes is included in the collection, as is further material on the Scottish Liberal Club, but, interestingly, papers of sub-groups of the party are also present. Therefore researchers can access information on the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation, the Scottish Liberal Free Trade Committee and the Scottish Reform Club, to give three examples. A further large collection of Scottish Liberal Party and Scottish Liberal Democrat material was deposited with the Manuscripts Division of the library in 2002. Although these papers are, as yet, unlisted, they represent a continuation from the previous accession and contain papers from the party's Scottish Executive, the Scottish Young Liberals, a large amount of photographs of the party's candidates for various elections, and further papers of the Scottish Liberal Club.

The principal accession of Scottish Liberal Party papers also has some material on local branches of the party. This had presumably been sent to the headquarters of the Scottish Party at some point and, therefore, became part of the main party archive. Iain Hutchison has suggested that local party papers can 'give an unrivalled glimpse

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into regular party work, and reveal aspects otherwise undetectable [from wider national material].⁴ The East of Scotland Liberal Federation, the Dumbar-tonshire Liberal Associations, the Midlothian Liberal Association, and the Haymarket Ward Liberal Association are all represented within the main collection and may offer the researcher an alternative perspective on issues discussed at a national level. Moreover, these are not the only local Liberal Party papers held by the National Library of Scotland. In 1985 the papers of the South Edinburgh Liberal Association (1885–1922) were placed with the Manuscripts Division by that body, with a further deposit (1924–73) taking place in 2001. In the same way as the papers of the Scottish Women’s Liberal Federation are held as part of the accession of the Scottish Liberal Party’s papers, the papers of the South Edinburgh Women’s Liberal Association are within the accession of the South Edinburgh Liberal Association’s papers. There could be considerable scope for research that compares the relationships, policies and actions of these women’s groups at local and national level, and between different areas of the country.

The National Library of Scotland was also able to purchase a small collection comprising a minute book, a cash book, and a small number of letters of the Kinross-shire Liberal Association (1889–1931) in 1987. Furthermore, the Manuscripts Division was presented with the minute books and other papers of the Buteshire (1892–1918), Kilmarnock (1901–23), and Ardrossan (1908–29) Liberal Associations in 2002. These records from the local Associations help to improve the geographic spread of the finest collection of Liberal Party material in Scotland.

No discussion of sources such as this would be complete without mention of the papers of the Liberal politicians which are also

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held by the Manuscripts Division. Hutchinson has argued that ‘it is curious that the party which almost sank into extinction [in the twentieth century] has the best sample of backbenchers’ records [available to researchers]’.⁵ Arguably, the collections in the National Library of Scotland surpass this statement. At all levels of politics represented in the papers held by the Library, from cabinet ministers to party activist, Liberals feature.

Perhaps the most high-profile collection is that of Archibald Philip Primrose, the 5th Earl of Rosebery, whose papers were presented to the National Library of Scotland in 1966 by Lord Primrose (later 7th Earl of Rosebery). The collection primarily concerns Rosebery’s political correspondence (1869–1927) and was used extensively by the Marquess of Crewe in his biography *Lord Rosebery*, (London, 1931). However, to mention Rosebery should not be to underplay the quality of the other papers of Liberal politicians in the collection. To return to the subject of the quote which provides the title for this index, the collection of diaries, speeches, articles and other papers (1950–83) of Jo Grimond, deposited in 1983, represent an interesting way to analyse the work of the man who is credited with the resurrection of the Liberal Party. The large amount of personal and family correspondence in the papers of Viscount Haldane could provide interesting perspectives on this Liberal statesman. Lord Russell-Johnston’s papers could provide a way for historians not only to analyse the Liberal influence on British politics, but also at a European level. Moreover, to concentrate purely on the Liberal politicians could be said to somewhat miss the point. Perhaps the influence of Liberal politics at a local level could be considered through the papers of people like John J. Reid, who was the Secretary of the Midlothian Liberal Association and whose letters

(1877–84) concern the affairs of the Association from its formation until Reid’s resignation in 1880, with particular emphasis on the famous Midlothian election campaign of 1879–80, when W. E. Gladstone was the successful candidate.⁶

The Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland has been able to ensure excellent coverage of the written record of Liberal politics in Scotland. Furthermore, through the good offices of various individuals and the party itself, this coverage has been achieved without major difficulties. If researchers are inclined to test Paddy Ashdown’s assertion in the title, or wish to analyse the role of women in Scottish Liberal politics, or how the Scottish Liberal Party has evolved and organised itself, or wish to return to Gladstone’s Midlothian campaign, or indeed wish to study a multitude of other subjects regarding the Liberals in Scotland, the papers held in the National Library of Scotland represent the best place to start.

The following list includes all the major accessions regarding the Liberal Party in the Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland divided into four categories: national party papers; local party papers; personal papers; and other papers relating to the Liberal Party. Each entry has a short note about the collection and its reference number which is prefixed by one of the following: MS; Acc; or Dep. Should you require any further information on the collections, some of our inventories are now available online. The easiest way to access these is through our ‘index to Modern Political Manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland’, which can be found at <http://www.nls.uk/catalogues/online/political-mss/index.html>. Please do not hesitate to contact the staff of the Manuscripts Division directly should you have any questions.⁷

ARCHIVES

1. National party papers

- SCOTTISH LIBERAL CLUB: Dep.275 and Acc.7107. minute books and house committee minutes books, 1879–1953.
- SCOTTISH LIBERAL PARTY and SCOTTISH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS: Acc.11765 and TD.3023 [this second reference is a temporary number until collection is listed and will change]. minutes and other papers regarding the East of Scotland Liberal Association, the Scottish Liberal Association/Federation, Scottish Women's Liberal Federation, Scottish Reform Club, General Election Addresses, Dumbartonshire Liberal Associations, Scottish Liberal Party Council and Executive, Midlothian Liberal Association, Scottish Liberal Free Trade Committee, J. M. Hogge Collection, Scottish Liberal Club, Geoffrey Taylor Collection, Haymarket Ward Liberal Association, Scottish Young Liberals, 1874–c.1987.

2. Local party papers

- BUTESHIRE, KILMARNOCK AND ARDROSSAN LIBERAL ASSOCIATIONS: Acc.12089. minutes and other papers 1892–1929.
- KINROSS-SHIRE LIBERAL ASSOCIATION: Acc.9491. minute book, cash-book and some assorted letters and papers, 1889–1931.
- SOUTH EDINBURGH LIBERAL ASSOCIATION: Acc.9080 and Acc.12038. minutes and papers including minutes of the St Cuthberts Ward Committee and the South Edinburgh Women's Liberal Association, 1885–1973.

3. Personal papers

- GRIMOND (Joseph (Jo)), later Baron Grimond, Liberal MP for Orkney and Shetland 1950–1983: Dep.363. diaries, articles and reviews, speeches and correspondence, 1952–1983.
- GULLAND (John W.), Liberal MP for Dumfries Burghs 1906–1918, Hon. Treasurer of Scottish Liberal Association, Hon. President Young Scots Society, Secretary to Scottish Liberal Committee in House of Commons 1906–1909, Junior Lord of the Treasury and Scottish Whip 1909–1915, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury 1915–1917: Acc.6868. correspondence, 1894–1927.
- HALDANE (Richard B.), later Viscount Haldane of Cloan, Liberal MP for Haddingtonshire 1885–1911, Secretary of State for War 1905–1912, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain 1912–1915 and 1924 (Labour): MSS.5901–6019, MSS.20001–20260. a large collection of letters and other papers including papers of other family members.
- JOHNSTON (D. Russell), later Lord Russell-Johnston, Liberal MP for Inverness 1964–1983, Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber 1983–1997 (Liberal Democrat after 1988): Acc.11682. papers in process of listing, not normally available – please contact Manuscripts Division.
- McLAREN (Duncan), Liberal MP for Edinburgh 1865–1881: MSS.24781–24784. correspondence, 1827–1880.
- McLAREN (John), later Lord McLaren, Liberal MP for Wigtown District 1880, Edinburgh 1881, Lord Advocate 1880, Lord of Session

Scotland 1881, Lord of Justiciary 1885: MS.24785, MSS.24789–24803. correspondence including some letters of Duncan McLaren, 1841–1909.

- MURRAY (Alexander W. C. O.), later Viscount Elibank, Liberal MP for Midlothian 1900–1905 and 1910–1912, Peebles and Selkirk 1906–1910, Chief Liberal Whip 1909–1912: MSS.8801–8804. correspondence 1895–1920.
 - MURRAY (Arthur C.), later Viscount Elibank, Liberal MP for Kincardineshire 1908–1918, Kincardineshire and West Aberdeenshire 1918–1923: MSS.8805–8824. correspondence, photographs, diaries, notes and other papers, 1909–1962.
 - PRIMROSE (Archibald P.), later Earl Rosebery, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1886 and 1892–1894, Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury 1894–1895: MSS.10001–10216 and MSS.10250–10253. political correspondence and papers including papers regarding the Liberal League, 1860–1927.
 - REID (John J.), advocate, the Secretary of the Midlothian Liberal Association: MS.19623. collection of letters concerning the Association, 1877–1884.
- ### 4. Other papers relating to the Liberal Party
- GRIMOND (Joseph (Jo)): Acc.12123. research papers of Michael McManus used in production of biography McManus M, Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire, (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2001).
 - YOUNG SCOTS SOCIETY: Acc.12097. type-script copy of article Elder R I, 'The Young Scots Soci-

ety: a Lost Liberal Legion', published in EDIT: Edinburgh University Graduates' Newsletter, (Spring 2002), and the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* (Liberal Democrat History Group, Issue 36, Autumn 2002).

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- ★ This list deals solely with the modern Liberal period and omits Whig politicians. The National Library of Scotland does have extensive holdings on Whig politicians (for example in the Minto collection) and researchers should contact staff for advice.
- 1 Paddy Ashdown cited in P. Joyce and G. Sell, 'Jo Grimond', in D. Brack (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (Politico's, London, 1998), p. 153.
- 2 Jo Grimond cited in Joyce and Sell, 'Jo Grimond', p. 153.
- 3 Since the deposit by the Scottish Liberal Democrats took place, the Manuscripts Division of the National Library of Scotland has accepted the deposit of the papers of the Scottish Green Party, further enhancing the coverage of the Modern Political collections.
- 4 I. G. C. Hutchison, 'Archival Sources for the Study of Scottish Political History in the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries: a survey', in *Scottish Archives: The Journal of the Scottish Records Association* (Scottish Records Association, Vol. 4, 1998), p. 38.
- 5 Hutchison, 'Archival Sources', p. 36.
- 6 Gladstone's Midlothian campaign of 1879 was described by the Checklands as 'the first "whistle-stop" election campaign: Mr Gladstone took politics to the people in a new way, haranguing local Scottish crowds from train windows and vast civic gatherings in public halls', O. Checkland and S. Checkland, *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832-1914* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2nd edn 1989), p. 77. As well as the papers of John Reid, researchers should also note that John McLaren played a role in the Midlothian campaign.
- 7 Manuscripts Division, National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EW, Tel: 0131 226 4531, Fax: 0131 466 2811, Email: manuscripts@nls.uk, Web Site: <http://www.nls.uk>

Liberal Democrat History Group meetings programme 2006-07

See back page for next two meetings.

Yellow Book versus Orange Book – Is it time for a New Liberalism?

A hundred years ago, the Liberal landslide victory in the 1906 election opened the way for a period of radical social reform based on the social-liberal ideology of the New Liberalism.

British Liberalism changed decisively from its nineteenth-century Gladstonian inheritance of non-interventionism in economic and social issues to accepting a much more activist role for the state, exemplified by the introduction of graduated income tax, old-age pensions and national insurance. With a few exceptions, the party adhered to this social liberalism throughout the remainder of the century.

In 2004, the authors of the *Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* challenged this 'nanny-state liberalism' and argued that the Liberal Democrats needed to return to their nineteenth-century heritage and 'reclaim economic liberalism'.

Which way now for the Liberal Democrats? What can we draw from the lessons of history? Debate the question with **Paul Marshall**, co-editor of the *Orange Book* and its successor, and **Ed Randall**, co-editor of the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*.

12.45, Wednesday 20 September 2006

Library, Hilton Metropole Hotel, Brighton

A Hundred Years On: The 1906 Landside in Perspective

This one-day conference seeks to re-evaluate the impact of the 1906 landslide victory. It will focus on the key electoral issues, from human rights to economics, and assess why it all went wrong thereafter.

Speakers include: **Vernon Bogdanor**, **Ewen Cameron**, **David Dutton** and **Ian Packer**.

10.00 – 4.30, Saturday 21 October

Robinson College, Cambridge

Cost: £25 (£15 for students and over-60s)

For further information, including up-to-date information on speakers, please contact **Dr Eugenio Biagini** (efb21@cam.ac.uk; Robinson College, Cambridge, CB3 9AN).

The Dictionary of Liberal Thought

Postponed from September, this meeting will see the launch of the History Group's latest publication.

The aim of the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* is to provide an accessible guide to the key figures, concepts, movements, factions and pressure groups associated with the ideas of the British Liberal Party (and SDP and Liberal Democrats) from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries.

The *Dictionary* will also cover representative major thinkers from the wider international tradition of liberal thought.

8.00pm, Friday 2 March 2007 (date and time provisional)

Harrogate (fringe meeting at Liberal Democrat spring conference)