

Liberal Democrat History Group

Annual General Meeting

6.30 p.m. Monday 28th January 2019

Lady Violet Room

National Liberal Club

1, Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

Agenda and calling notice

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 5th February 2018
3. Report from the Chair on activities during 2018
4. Report from the Treasurer and annual accounts
5. Report from the Membership Secretary
6. Election of Officers for 2018–19
Chair
Secretary
Treasurer
Membership Secretary
Five ordinary members of the Executive Committee
Nominations, including self-nominations, may be made to the Secretary, in writing or by email (address below), at any time up until the start of the AGM.
7. Any other business

Gladstone's first government, 1868–74

One hundred and fifty years ago, in December 1868, William Ewart Gladstone became Prime Minister for the first time. Over the following six years, from 1868 to 1874, his government produced a series of lasting reforms, including nationwide primary school education, the secret ballot, legalisation of some trade union activities and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. This record helped build his reputation as the greatest Liberal leader in history.

In this meeting Professor Jon Parry and Dr David Brooks discuss the importance and legacy of what might be considered the first Liberal government and the first modern administration.

Jon Parry is Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, specialising in the history of British politics and political ideas in the nineteenth century. His publications include *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* and *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*. Dr Brooks is Emeritus Lecturer in History at Queen Mary University London. He has written extensively on Gladstone and organises the annual 'Gladstone Umbrella' weekend conference at Gladstone's Library in Hawarden.

7.00pm, Monday 28th January 2019 (following the History Group's AGM at 6.30pm)

Minutes of the meeting held at on 5th February 2018, Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, London

1. *Present*

Those signing the attendance sheet were: Eugenio Biagini, Duncan Brack, Ian Cawood, David Cloke, Julian Cooper, Soon Yeng Chiam, John De'Ath, Leslie DuBow, David Evans, Anthony Greville, James Gurling, Anders Hanson, Desmond Hillary, Simon Horsman, Roger Jenking, Peter Ladanyi, Tony Little, Denis Loretto, Derek McAuley, Bob Maddock, Patrick Mitchell, Michael Mullarny, Brian Orrell, Geoff Payne, Richard Pealling, Rosemary Pettit, Chris, Lord Rennard, John Roberts, Marcia Roberts, Iain Sharpe, Cec Tallack, Nigel Taylor, Seth Thevoz, Graham Tope, Victoria Trelinska, Marek Trelinski, Martin Walker, Peter Whyte, Gordon Willey, Martin Wright – 49 attendees.

2. *Apologies*

Apologies had been received from: Roger Crouch, Russell Deacon, Alistair Down, Gareth Epps, Paul Fox, James Gardner, Mark Greenfield, Keith House, Derek Honeygold, Paul Hunt, Graham Lippiatt, Ruth Polling, David Rogers, Alan Sherwell, Michael Steed, David, Lord Steel.

3. *Minutes of AGM 2017*

Accepted

4. *Matters Arising*

None

5. *Chair's Report*

The Chair noted that his report had been circulated in advance but stated that he would like to emphasise a few key points. The Group was operating in a time of polarised politics and this strengthened the need to get facts debated and analysis done to ensure that debate was properly informed. In addition, people were more sensitive than in the past and the Group needed to make sure that it responded to that and, therefore, to any feedback.

The Chair also reflected that the 25 years since the Group's founding had passed very quickly and they were coming up to the 100th edition of the Journal and that he hoped that they would be able to make something special of it. He also argued that the fact that the Group had survived for so long, had grown, avoided financial crisis and put on a wide range of meetings gave a lot to celebrate. There was also a pretty active programme planned with a meeting at the Spring Conference marking 100 years since women got the vote; the summer meeting on the Coupon election and a meeting on Europe at the Autumn Conference. The next special edition of the Journal would also be on Europe with the following special edition marking 150 years since Gladstone formed his first Government.

The group had also been working its pamphlets with an enlarged edition of Mothers of Liberty and the republication of Liberal Thinkers. It had plans for a pamphlet for newer members on What did the Liberals ever do for us? and a publication marking the 50th anniversary of ALDC. The group also planned to update and refresh its website and make more use of Twitter and Facebook.

He closed by thanking the members of the Committee, especially the younger members who had to move on, and noted that there was scope for others to fill in the gaps and a need to address the gender and ethnic balance of the group.

The Chair's report was accepted.

5. *Report by the Treasurer*

The outgoing treasurer Chris Millington formally moved the accounts noting that there had been a slight reduction in income but a greater reduction in expenditure. He briefly talked through the accounts noting that the publications referred to where those mentioned by the Chair in his report; that sales had gone up

because of the use of the on-line shop and the successful marketing of the Liberal History booklet to local parties; the royalties income was from Liberal leaders; printing costs had gone down partly because there had been fewer journals and envelopes and postage costs had been moved to 'mailings'.

The accounts were accepted.

The Treasurer formally moved that Andrew Thurburn and Co be the Group's accountants. This was accepted.

6. *Report from Membership Secretary*

The Chair introduced Patrick Mitchell by noting that he had completed his final year as Membership Secretary, a role he had undertaken since the Group's establishment in 1993. The Group, therefore, had relied on him a lot.

Patrick Mitchell reported that it had been expected that there would be a large reduction in membership because of the increase in fee. Those who hadn't increased their subscription but continued to pay were now not regarded as members. Overall renewals had been at the expected rate with the usual number of new members.

He proposed that the subscription rates remained the same. This was agreed.

7. *Elections*

The following were elected to the Committee unopposed:

Chair: Tony Little;

Secretary: David Cloke;

Treasurer: Paul Fox

Membership Secretary: Martin Walker

Journal Editor: Duncan Brack

Website: Chris Millington

Meetings Organiser: Neil Stockley

Conference Organiser: Ruth Polling

Ordinary Members: Patrick Mitchell

Co-options: Russell Deacon; York Member; Mark Pack

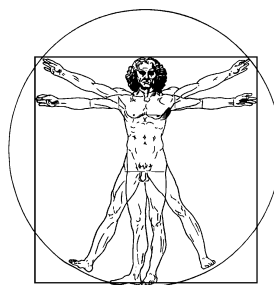
The Chair noted that there were a number of roles that could be undertaken that weren't at present if members were interested.

8. *Any Other Business*

Jo Grimond Plaque. It was reported that there had been delays in getting this installed with planning permission required from Kensington and Chelsea Council as well as listed building consent as the building was Grade 2 listed. The owners of the property were very much in favour. They had asked English Heritage for support but they had said that they didn't think Grimond's contribution had been significant enough. Nonetheless, they were confident that sufficient money could be raised. Lord Steel had also said that he would be willing to unveil the plaque.

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Chair's Report For the year 2018



December 2018 marked 150 years since Gladstone's great victory in the 1868 election and the formation of his first government. This event is being celebrated in a special edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* and in the event which follows our AGM. But it also serves as a reminder of his key strengths. Gladstone was a man of clear vision for our country, with the skills to persuade the electorate of the value of his mission, and the administrative ability to implement his policies. In the 1840s, while still a Tory, Gladstone became convinced of the benefits of Free Trade but, as the quarrels over the Corn Laws in the 1840s, imperial preference after 1902 and Brexit currently demonstrate, it is a powerfully destructive concept for the Conservative party.

As financial salesmen are forced to warn, past performance is no guide to the future but knowing the causes and solutions of past problems may help avoid the more obvious pitfalls of current political quandaries. This has helped guide us in commissioning articles and meetings for the group.

Meetings

There have been two clear examples in our meetings over the last year. Firstly, the very open discussion between James Gurling and Professor Phil Cowley of the 2017 general election, which followed the AGM last year, laid bare both the tactical choices made by Tim Farron and the concerns for the future evident in the party's limited recovery at the election. Secondly we returned to the theme of Europe at the autumn conference fringe meeting at Brighton, where two very thoughtful academics, Eugenio Biagini and Anthony Howe illuminated the approaches to Europe of two very different Victorians – Joseph Chamberlain and William Gladstone.

Naturally we could not let the year pass without marking the centenary of some women gaining the franchise in parliamentary elections. At the spring party conference in Southport, Krista Cowman took

the story back to the capping of election expenses in the 1880s which ended paid canvassing and drew women into the 'donkey work' of electioneering while Jo Swinson, stepping in as a late substitute, outlined several reasons why political campaigning is still a necessity for women today.

The other centenary marked in 2018 was the coupon election of 1918, where women first exercised their franchise, and where a Liberal Prime Minister was last confirmed in office, if in the coalition which fought and won the Great War. This meeting was held in one of the Lords committee rooms which added to the atmosphere of the well-attended meeting.

I would like to thank all our speakers and chairs, for giving us such an informative and varied programme. I would also like to thank Neil Stockley who has taken on the time consuming task of organisation for us.

Journal of Liberal History

This year the Journal reached its 100th issue and celebrated twenty five years of publication. Helping to put together the new special issue on the Gladstone Government has made me even more conscious of the effort required to construct the *Journal of Liberal History* from the invitations to contributors (and subsequent nagging to meet deadlines) through to the editing, selecting of illustrations and proofing. So on behalf of members I would like to thank our contributors and the editorial team headed by Duncan Brack for the high standards they have continued to maintain for our flagship publication.

Inevitably, perhaps, this year the special issue explored the Liberal commitment to Europe but rather than dwell on the endless contradictions of the current debate we aimed to give the much deeper background of the longer term engagement of Liberals with our neighbours in the nineteenth

century and how the party became committed to the European Union when the other parties each had their reasons for hesitation.

In our other issues we have provided the usual pot-pouri of articles, reviews and reports from an Interview with Tim Farron and reviews of David Law's coalition books to a range of articles on the Lloyd George/Asquith period. As always our meetings are fully reported in the *Journal* but an innovation this year was a review of the recent BBC television series on the Jeremy Thorpe scandal with an accompanying interview with David Steel highlighting some of the historical distortions which went with the entertainment. While we veteran members will remember that turbulent period from our own experience of it, I suspect that a majority of both group and party members are too young and it is important their attention is drawn to the facts.

We have been blessed in the recent past by significant contributions to the *Journal* from leading academics and from senior (in both senses) members of the party. But we do welcome contributions from those nearer the beginning of a writing career provided they have something interesting to say and the work meets the standards our members have every right to expect. We are very conscious, for example, that we have not published much on the very beginnings of party conflict in the seventeenth century or Whig dominance of the eighteenth century.

Publications

The focus last year has been on working through the stocks of our existing books and pamphlets rather than producing new ones, to recoup the capital laid out for their printing

This does not reflect a shortage of ideas for new publications but obstacles to their development. A set of biographical dictionaries for twentieth century figures of the leading political parties has been broadly scoped out but has so far, at least, not acquired sufficient sponsorship for our usual publisher to give the go ahead. A sign perhaps of both a tougher economy and the lower esteem in which politicians are held.

We recognise the need for an essay on the 2010-2015 coalition to complement our book on the history of the party. We believe it would also work as a stand-alone pamphlet. The story of the coalition has been told in the narratives of

interested parties but still stands in need of an analytical approach. We have set a tentative publication date of the Autumn conference.

We are also planning a publication on Liberal achievements over the last three centuries but that is also in its early stages and we would welcome assistance with its writing.

As an experiment, we have professionally recorded the Concise History and are working to make it available in the near future on Amazon as an audio book. When it is we would welcome your feedback.

Social Media

We know that the group's web site provides a valuable resource and by making older issues of the *Journal* freely available we are strengthening its potential year by year. Similarly we are making use of Twitter and Facebook to make people aware of our presence. However these are still the aspects of our work requiring the most effort and we would much appreciate more members helping with this work.

Committee

As indicated last year, we have had a number of changes to the committee which have strengthened our efficiency and I would like to express my gratitude all my colleagues for their work in the last year.

We are still looking for new members to bring greater diversity to our work and fresh ideas. Enthusiasm and a willingness to contribute are the essential qualifications required.

Lord Ashdown

As this report was being compiled Lord Ashdown lost his battle with cancer and the Liberal Democrats lost a great asset. Paddy was not just an energetic forward looking leader but a man with a great awareness and understanding of the history of the party and the philosophy of Liberalism. Over the years the group was blessed to have Paddy as a speaker and a chair at our meetings and on each occasion I felt we had been uplifted and fortified by his contribution. A full appreciation will be published in the spring *Journal*.

Tony Little

December 2018