

Research via Twitter

David Hanson MP tracks down the origin of two 1874 election leaflets

'Vote for Mr Crum and one other Liberal'

THE FIRST LEAFLET from the 1874 election proclaims boldly: 'Vote for Mr J. C. Bolton and Mr Alexander Crum'. The second, more mysteriously, says: 'Vote for Mr Crum and one other Liberal.' They have been on the wall in my house ever since I found them in a Wrexham jumble sale for £1, maybe fifteen years ago.

I'd never thought much of it except thinking that Mr Bolton had got cold feet, withdrawn and at that stage no Liberal had been picked to succeed him – but I wasn't sure. How they got from Glasgow, where I now know they were first pushed through a door in 1874, to a Wrexham yard sale is a mystery for another day, but there they were: grey, a bit tattered, but fascinating nonetheless – at least for election nerds like me!

I'd known they were from Glasgow and I knew also that both candidates had made it to Parliament eventually (though not for seats in that great city), but who they were in 1874, what had caused Mr Bolton to withdraw, and what happened to cause this mess in the first place remained lost in time.

Until now – and until Twitter helped.

On 4 February 2018, 144 years to the day after the election took place, I posted the leaflets on Twitter and asked just that: who are these guys and why the mess? Answers came back in floods from all corners, including constituents of mine doing detective work on a wet Sunday afternoon, through to Liberal Democrat activists, Commons historians and Twitter feeds, including the

@thevictoriancommons whose purpose is to chart life in the Victorian House of Commons.

Thanks to them, but especially thanks to the said @thevictoriancommons, the picture emerged of an era of Liberal history – some might say a confused one – as a result. So here it is: Liberal Glasgow, 1874.

Glasgow's Liberals, through a mixture of confusion and political differences, have nominated too many candidates for the election. It appears that it was a case of too many Liberal cooks – or factions – spoiling the broth.

Glasgow then had three seats in Parliament and a multi-member election. The issue is simply that there are too many Liberals in the field – four for Glasgow's three seats (plus, confusingly, Mr Kerr, who proclaims himself a Liberal though not officially being one).

Messrs Bolton, Crum, Cameron and Anderson have all been listed as the Liberals, Kerr, who is also listed as Liberal, is campaigning on the issue of Home Rule. Crum and Bolton, who run together, are from the moderate/Whig section of the Liberal Party, while Cameron and Anderson are more advanced Liberals from the Radical wing.

After several days of negotiations, Bolton, on the advice of his election committee, withdraws. With Bolton no longer in the running, Crum's supporters are encouraged to give their second votes to either Anderson or Cameron. However, Bolton was too late to withdraw, and his name appeared on the

ballot paper anyway. All along, I'd been thinking that the Liberals had just not chosen a replacement following Bolton's standing down.

The result: two Liberals and one Tory elected. Bolton's attempt to encourage Liberal unity did not prevent the return of a Conservative for the third seat. And Mr Bolton still got 169 votes despite not wanting any.

The full result was:

Cameron, Dr. Charles (L)	18,455
Anderson, Geo. (L)	17,902
Whitelaw, Alex. (C)	14,134
Hunter, James (C)	12,552
Crum, Alex. (L)	7,453
Kerr, F (L)	4,444
Bolton, J.C. (L)	169

Mr Bolton eventually ended up as MP for Stirlingshire for twelve years. Mr Crum was elected unopposed as the Member of Parliament for Renfrewshire at a by-election in November 1880. He held the seat until the constituency was divided at the 1885 general election, when he did not stand again.

If they had managed to sort it out earlier perhaps it would have been different. If there is a moral, it's that divided parties lose elections.

Oh, and always keep election leaflets – they are the story of their era.

Rt Hon David Hanson has been the Labour MP for Delyn since 1992. He was a minister in three government departments between 2005 and 2010.

