

Liberal History News

Spring 2019

Saving Dunford House

Help us save Dunford House, the birthplace and home of Richard Cobden, from developers!

Who is he?

Richard Cobden – the most highly referenced politician in the current climate, successful career in Manchester, MP for Stockport and Rochdale, repealer of the Corn Laws, apostle of Free Trade, advocate of peace and goodwill to all, promoter of international peace, ardent reformer dedicated to raising the poor and vulnerable out of poverty.

The background

Dunford House and Estate, located in Midhurst, West Sussex, was altruistically gifted to the YMCA in 1952 as a perpetual, permanent endowment to enable them to use it for general educational purposes. What remains of the Estate is the Grade 2 Listed House and surrounding land, the essence of Richard Cobden's home.

Fast forward to 2019 and the YMCA have closed Dunford with a view to wanting to dispose of it. The YMCA have been custodians of Dunford, honouring the original Trust deed, and now the Cobden family, together with a number of friends, have put an offer to the YMCA to buy it back, enabling the YMCA to be released from their stewardship.

Why is it important to save Dunford?

It is the last remaining example of a Victorian middle class Liberal politician home which still contains a number of Cobden family artefacts, including the Seal of the Corn Laws and a gift from Napoleon III as gratitude for negotiating a peace treaty with France.

The House is of architectural significance, with part of it built in the Italianate style fashionable in the 1850s. Many distinguished guests have visited Dunford over the years, including Ghandi, playwright George Bernard Shaw and Beveridge, pioneer and



co-creator of the welfare state. In later years Dunford played a significant role in hosting international conferences. Through Cobden's suffragette and suffragist daughters the House became known as a beacon for feminism, in particular for women's right to vote.

Our plan

A compelling business plan has been created which would ensure that the original intention of the Cobden family continues to be respected. This will involve preserving and modernising Dunford and recreating a conference centre and also a Museum so the public can see, enjoy and learn about the history of Dunford – Liberalism, internationalism and women's rights, amongst other things.

Just as importantly, the plan is also to service less fortunate groups of society and embed a community spirit of wellbeing and togetherness which isn't always prevalent in today's society. We would reach out to young people, the elderly and low-income groups and help alleviate social concerns such as wellbeing, mental health and loneliness.

Our ask

For the past few months we have cast our net wide to grant-providers,

organisations, lenders and individuals, but we have a shortfall and time is pressing. Our Ask is therefore to reach out to the people and ask for help so you can help 'buy a brick' to preserve part of our English heritage and enable us to foster a community spirit and help people in need today.

People helping people – which is the core of Richard Cobden's legacy.

All donations are welcome, no matter how large or small. We are, however, hoping we can collect individual support donations of £250 to allow us to make a difference and reach our target.

Please pledge your support via email to nickcobdenwright@icloud.com or contact us via our website, www.cobdenfoundation.org.

All names of donors and donation values will be confidential unless you express otherwise. We will track the level of interest and ask for the donations to be transferred only at the point when our offer is accepted by the YMCA.

The fundraising target will not be shared for now but we will publicise through the national and local press how we are doing and at the end of the campaign the totals will be shared so you will have full transparency. Thank you for your understanding.

What will you gain by donating?

Pride that you are helping to save a piece of English heritage and to avoid it from being lost and redeveloped by third parties not connected to Dunford.

Expressing gratitude to the YMCA for their custodianship and allowing them to be released from it so they can continue good works for their beneficiaries.

The sense that you will be directly contributing to our society's sense of wellbeing and connection.

An 'open ticket' to visit Dunford when it is restored so you too can enjoy it and be part of the community you are contributing towards.

For large donations and sponsorship we will publicise our connection and your support (if you wish this to happen).

More information

Join Philippa Gregory and Helen Pankhurst CBE in supporting our campaign. You can find out more about their support and our campaign updates on The Cobden Foundation website at www.cobdenfoundation.org.

Thank you for your support. It is very much appreciated.

*Nick Cobden Wright
(Richard Cobden's great, great, great
grandson and campaign co-lead),
on behalf of the Cobden family*

Restoring Liberal Democrat party political broadcasts

Liberal Democrat party HQ has in storage an archive of tapes (audio and video) of party election broadcasts. However, the storage facility is not ideal and the tapes are deteriorating.

The LSE Library, where the party archives are mostly held, have experimented with restoring and digitising three tapes to test them out and see what can be achieved. You can see three examples online:

- Party political broadcast with John Cleese, 27 February 1997; VHS Archive: <https://youtu.be/V47dtVqSoJo>
- Party political broadcast with John Cleese, on PR, 6 October 1998; VHS Archive: <https://youtu.be/IZ3jsXCHlFk>
- Paddy Ashdown montage VHS from the Liberal Democrat archive: <https://youtu.be/OFssovWlxsk>

In total there are 477 individual items in the archives. At completion of the digitisation project, a standalone server with all media would be supplied which would also provide the opportunity to provide a website searchable directory of master content.

HQ has been quoted an estimated total of around £30,000 to complete the

digitisation project – which the party cannot afford.

If any reader of the *Journal* knows anyone who might be willing to fund such a project, or undertake some of the digitisation work themselves (which would require appropriate equipment), please let the Editor know (at journal@liberalhistory.org.uk), and your details will be passed on to Sian Waddington, Director of Operations at party HQ.

Corrigenda

A small error crept into the article 'Gladstone and the 1870 Elementary Education Act' by Geoffrey Chorley in *Journal of Liberal History* 101 (winter 2018–19).

The sentence on page 46, left-hand column, 21 lines down, should read:

Here we must distinguish the original interpretation of the Cowper-Temple clause itself from Cowper-Templeism, the clause in the Act enhanced with Jacob Bright's unsuccessful amendment in parliament.

(The issue as printed has 'Cowper-Temple' instead of 'Cowper-Templeism'.) Our apologies to the author and our readers.

On This Day ...

Every day the History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three. To see them regularly, look at www.liberalhistory.org.uk or www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup or follow us at: **LibHistoryToday**.

March

1 March 1929: Lloyd George pledges to reduce unemployment to 'normal' proportions within a year through a series of work programmes. The launch of *We Will Conquer Unemployment*, the policy document containing this pledge, formed the backbone of the Liberals' election campaign for the 1929 election. The proposal to use national development projects to create work for the unemployed was rooted in *Britain's Industrial Future* (the 'Yellow Book'), which had been published in 1928.

April

2 April 1865: Death of Richard Cobden, manufacturer and Radical and Liberal statesman. Cobden's work in founding the Anti-Corn Law League in 1839 is seen as integral to overturning these laws. Elected as MP for Stockport in 1841, Cobden was able to argue the case for reform inside Parliament, and the work of the League, coupled with the Irish potato famine, led in 1846 to Sir Robert Peel's Tory government repealing the laws. Cobden declined positions in both Lord John Russell's and Lord Palmerston's governments. An opponent of the Crimean War, he was openly criticised for his opposition to the government's foreign policy. He devoted much of the rest of his career to promoting free trade and peace, seeing the former as a way to deliver the latter.

May

9 May 1943: Happy birthday to Sir Vince Cable, Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham 1997–2015 and 2017 onwards. A Liberal at university, Cable later joined the Labour Party, serving as a Glasgow councillor in the 1970s. In 1982 he joined the SDP. Following the resignation of Menzies Campbell in 2007, Cable served as acting party leader until Nick Clegg was elected. During the coalition government, Cable served in the cabinet as Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. He lost his seat to the Conservatives in 2015 but was re-elected in 2017, becoming party leader, unopposed, after Tim Farron's resignation.