

a negative reaction at home. This challenge was evident in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The defeat of France and rise of Germany created a panic over British military preparedness and destroyed Gladstone's budget plans. The reason he called the 1874 election was to circumvent the demands of the defence ministers for higher expenditure but public opinion had moved against him. The war was followed by the raising of tariffs on the Continent undermining free trade and the Eastern Crisis, which further polarised public thinking. The right-wing press exploited the development of a consciously anti-Gladstonian feeling, backing the military demands and accusing Gladstone of lacking patriotism. This beginning of a new attitude to empire and its expansion is what makes Gladstone look unusual as an internationalist.

An early question from the audience asked about the attitude of Gladstone's government to the Franco-Prussian war. Professor Parry responded that the government was anxious to be neutral and it would be hard to see which side they could have taken. The prime British objectives were to preserve Belgian neutrality and to arbitrate between the two powers, though this was declined.

The Great Energiser

Other questions ranged between aspects of the first government not developed in the speeches, electoral issues and Gladstone's personality.

Asked why Gladstone failed to secure re-election at the end of his periods as premier, the speakers pointed out that this was not unusual in the Victorian period, rather that Palmerston's 1865 victory was exceptional. David Brooks added that Disraeli was wise in not taking office in 1873 after the defeat of the Irish University Bill, as he would have needed to propose a programme for government and given the Liberals a chance to recover. Instead, at the 1874 election he needed only to attack Gladstone's failings to win.

In response to a question about the lack of welfare reforms, it was argued that Gladstone believed more in individual responsibility and the role of charity rather than public expenditure. Indeed Conservatives were earlier than Liberals in taking up housing policy. Paraphrasing Gladstone's words, David Brooks suggested that he believed

the Conservatives were 'all socialists at heart'. Most welfare was provided through the Poor Law operating at a local level, which Gladstone supported. Despite its poor reputation, the Poor Law was the nursery of the welfare state. Jon Parry added that education was the exception promoted by Gladstone despite the controversy aroused among Liberals suspicious of state interference in most areas.

Asked if Gladstone changed his mind in a 'constructivist' direction by endorsing the Newcastle Programme in 1892, David Brooks suggested that the programme was less collectivist than might be thought. There were around twenty-five proposals with home rule very much at the top followed by Welsh Church disestablishment. What it did not contain was old-age pensions, which Joe Chamberlain proposed the same year in alliance with the Conservatives. Nevertheless Gladstone's final government did restrict the hours of railway workers. Jon Parry added that Gladstone, reflecting on the problems of the 1868–74 government, was determined to avoid the destructive effects of factionalism within Liberalism. He focused on the single-issue crusade, as defined by himself, such as Bulgaria or home rule and resisted the tendency among Liberal MPs to promote competing social interests.

Jon Parry believed that the adoption of the secret ballot was not consequent on the example of other nations but a response to the expansion of the

electorate. It became a key Radical demand in the 1830s in reaction to the pressure put on electors by landlords and employers, and a consensus developed after 1867 when the Radicals were joined by the Right who feared pressure on workers from organised trade unions.

Asked how essential Gladstone was to the government, David Brooks mused about whether one of the Whigs, Clarendon (died in 1870), Granville (too emollient) or Hartington (too laid back), might have stepped up to the position, without convincing himself, before concluding that Gladstone was the government's great energiser who dominated the House of Commons. Jon Parry added that it would be difficult to imagine anyone else leading while Gladstone was around. He was obsessed, in a positive way, with the process of government, fascinated by drafting, shaping and driving legislation through parliament. His very hands-on style reflected his religious belief that he had to account before God for every hour and therefore that parliament had to account for every hour, a style that others found completely exhausting.

Tony Little is chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group and guest-edited the special issue of the Journal marking the 150th anniversary of Gladstone's first government. He was joint editor and contributor to the History Group's British Liberal Leaders, published in 2015.

Reviews

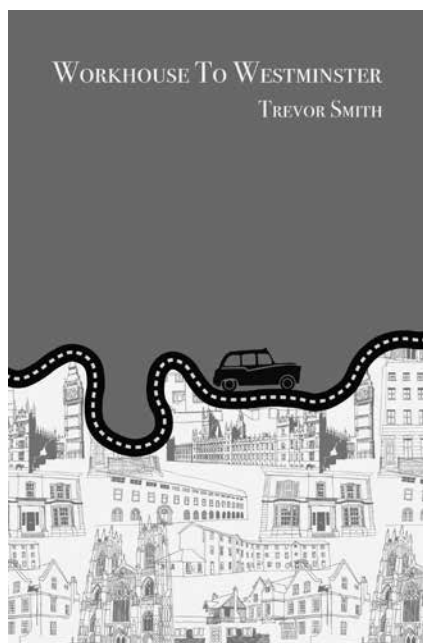
Liberal lives

Trevor Smith, *Workhouse to Westminster* (Caper Press, 2018)

Review by **Seth Alexander Thévoz**

TREVOR SMITH HAS written an exceptionally enjoyable memoir, which may suffer from the lack of any obvious single audience. This should be a tribute to the man; and particularly, to the range of worlds his life has stridden, as a political scientist, as

head of one of the largest political funding bodies in British history, as head of the University of Ulster, and latterly as a member of the House of Lords. I fear that this means that the book is doomed to be 'raided' by future scholars looking for pithy quips focused on just one of



Smith's lives, while all too easily overlooking the others. That is a pity, because the patient reader is rewarded with a rollickingly indiscreet, well-observed, self-mocking autobiography.

Most political memoirs have an eminently skippable set of opening 'childhood' chapters, full of mawkish sentimentality. Smith eschews this approach, and instead gives us a rather riveting social history of London, with his early life from Hanwell to Fitzrovia serving as an introduction to this, and setting up some intriguing arguments on geography and power – themes which recur throughout the book.

Having been active in 1950s Union of Liberal Students politics when the party was barely past its nadir, and having stood for election in 1959, Smith largely abandoned electoral politics thereafter, in favour of exercising Liberal ideas in other spheres. This was a decade before 'community politics' gained traction, but Smith chose to pursue outlets that weren't rooted in just one physical place. There has yet to be a really good account of how a range of active Liberals did this in the Liberal Party's gloomiest years, for instance finding print and broadcast media as well as academia as outlets for Liberal ideas – and the life Smith presents here is an example of this. As a political scientist analysing corporate and political power, and later, as vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster, he was able to put Liberal ideas into practice, proving that one did not need to have held ministerial seals of office to get things done. In the latter case, the book argues

that far from being the 'backwater' appointment that many of his fellow academics regarded it as, the post was unique in giving him 'top table' influence in the Northern Ireland peace process of the 1990s – something no other vice-chancellorship would have done.

His time at the Joseph Rowntree Social Services Trust is of particular interest. It (and its rebranded successor, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust) has long been seen as a Lib Dem 'sugar daddy', but this was far from being the case when Smith took over as chair, and the book tantalisingly touches on some of the fascinating politics behind funding British politics. He was also instrumental in funding the first 'Chocolate Soldiers' (researchers for opposition MPs) in the early 1970s, a flurry of constitutional reform initiatives such as Charter 88 in the 1980s, and a string of progressive causes abroad, such as Zimbabwean opposition groups. Once Mugabe turned into a despot in office, the Trust (which had supported him) transferred its support to the Movement for Democratic Change.

Readers will also be surprised by some of the book's pithy judgements on Liberal leaders, several of which challenge conventional wisdom – the widely lauded Jo Grimond, for instance, emerges as a dilettante snob, closer to David Cameron than to John Stuart

Mill. Smith is particularly scathing about Jeremy Thorpe, and the book is worth reading alone for the light it sheds on the Thorpe scandal, and the hitherto untold role of how the Rowntree Trusts were involved in persuading former Liberal MP Peter Bessell to testify against his former parliamentary colleague.

Throughout the book, Smith's impish and often risqué sense of humour is evident – from his description of Tim Farron as 'The Lib Dems' answer to Cliff Richard', to a distinctly X-rated anecdote about the choice of lubricants in Northern Ireland, which had me roaring with laughter.

The reader leaves this book realising that Trevor Smith was, in the eighties and nineties, probably one of the most powerful people you'd never heard of. Such an anonymous exercising of power rarely lends itself to the public good, and such people are usually notoriously publicity shy. We are therefore all the richer for this impressive, illuminating and amusing memoir.

Dr Seth Alexander Thévoz is an Associate Member of Nuffield College, Oxford, and Honorary Librarian at the National Liberal Club, London. His book, Club Government: How the Early Victorian World Was Ruled from London Clubs was published by I.B. Tauris in 2018.

Restoring Herbert Gladstone

Kenneth D. Brown, *The Unknown Gladstone: The Life of Herbert Gladstone, 1854–1930* (I.B.Tauris, 2018)

Review by Roger Swift

HERBERT GLADSTONE, THE youngest son of the eminent Victorian prime minister, William Ewart Gladstone, remains one of the forgotten men of the late-Victorian and Edwardian political world, despite a productive career in the Liberal Party within which he exercised considerable political influence on the question of Irish home rule, served as a most effective chief whip in helping to secure the great Liberal victory of 1906, attained cabinet office under Campbell Bannerman and Asquith as home secretary, and became the first governor

general of the Union of South Africa. Yet Herbert Gladstone has defied serious biographical study, the exception being Sir Charles Mallet's modest work of 1932, *Herbert Gladstone: A Memoir*, and his achievements have been largely understated in the historiography of the Liberal Party, not least because throughout his life he lived in the shadow of his illustrious father, with whom he shared an intense emotional and psychological empathy. In this excellent and much-needed biography, Professor Kenneth Brown seeks to rescue Herbert Gladstone from obscurity