

Reviews

Lloyd George replied, 'Yes, but we want you in the shell factory first.' Soon Christabel replaced her mouthpiece *The Suffragette* with *Britannia* (slogan 'For King, for Country, for Freedom'), which specialised in virulent attacks on Asquith, Grey and Haldane for their alleged incompetence and peace sympathies. Effectively Lloyd George had enticed the Pankhursts into his camp for little in return. Christabel's pay-off came at the 1918 general election when, standing for her Women's Party in Smethwick, she was the only woman candidate to receive his Coalition coupon.

Christabel's rancour towards the Liberal Party resurfaced in 1957 when Roger Fulford, a prominent Liberal, published his book *Votes for Women*. She was appalled when Lady Violet Bonham-Carter's favourable comments on the book were broadcast on the BBC: 'I have never heard in the whole of our history such a vindictive diatribe against us, for the way in which we treated her father' [i.e., Asquith]. As for Fulford 'he is just a party-political Liberal – 3 times a Liberal candidate – who knows what the WSPU did to the last Liberal Govt – last in two senses of the word'. She was so agitated by the book that a close friend feared she might have a stroke.

The WSPU's antipathy for the Liberals was fully

reciprocated. Many women Liberal suffragists – part of wider and much larger 'law-abiding' suffragist movement – were exasperated and highly critical of suffragette tactics, which they believed inflamed opposition and delayed attainment of the vote. There is thus some historical irony in the then Lib-Dem deputy-leader, Jo

Swinson's WSPU sash worn in the 2018 Commons celebrations. The truth is that, for much of its existence, the WSPU and the Liberal Party were sworn enemies.

Dr Jaime Reynolds is a retired UK and EU civil servant and independent researcher. He is currently researching the first women leaders in British local politics.

Local Liberal history

Martin Kyrle, *The Liberals in Hampshire – a Part(l)y History. Part 5, Eastleigh 1981–90: Control!* (Sarsen Press, 2022)

Review by **Mark Egan**

IN 1994, I started researching the grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1964, for a doctorate that I eventually received in 2000. The conventional wisdom in political science at the time was that political activity at local level was largely irrelevant, elections being decided by big national trends. Some literature was beginning to emerge that looked at the composition of the three main political parties, and there were some academic studies, mostly in the US, which showed a link between local campaigning and election results, but I felt that I was ploughing a lonely furrow, especially in focusing on the Liberals. One of my

immediate challenges was that there were very few books about the Liberals during my chosen period. Also, in those far-off, pre-internet days, finding out basic information such as who the party's candidates were in general elections, and what the outcomes of local elections had been, was a major task. Thanks to Tony Greaves's bookshop, I bought all of *The Times's* House of Commons guides for the period (except for 1945, which was and remains too expensive) which got me started with candidates. I also spent hours churning through old copies of the *Municipal Journal* and *The Times* to work out what was happening in local government.

He probably doesn't remember, but Martin Kyrle was one of the 140-plus 'old' Liberals that I interviewed, in his case to find out more about the party's revival in Southampton in the early 1960s. It's great to discover that he's still around and still contributing to contemporary understanding of where the Liberal Democrats have come from. His series on the Liberals in Hampshire begins in the fervour of the Grimond revival; volume five brings us to the Alliance era. This isn't an account of Liberals across the county, its focus is on Eastleigh, a particularly interesting borough given how dominant the Liberals and, latterly, Liberal Democrats have been there over several decades. This book deals with the period when the Liberals went from third place on the council to taking control (with the SDP). What does it tell us?

Firstly, Martin includes a number of leaflets that show how the party communicated with voters. They all focus (no pun intended) entirely on local issues and go into considerable detail. It feels like voters were being spoken to as adults without any of the posturing which sometimes characterises political leaflets today. The absence of reference to national issues is particularly striking and reflects how 'Focus' style leaflets first appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s. A strength at local

level, this approach perhaps reinforced the notion that the Liberals could not succeed at national level.

Secondly, the story of Eddie Perry's recruitment to the party is also noteworthy. Perry was a local businessman and was approached to stand for the council by two existing councillors on the basis that his professional background was different from that of the existing council group. 'How do you know I am a Liberal?' he asked. 'We know how you run your business, how you treat your staff and how you speak to the customers. We've both known you long enough to feel confident.' After a brief period of consideration, Perry joined the party, was elected to the council and served for many years. In my research, I came across a number of examples of local Liberals recruiting prominent members of the community to stand for the council before they joined the party and with scant knowledge of their actual politics. Again, there were pros and cons to this approach, but it certainly seems to have worked in Eastleigh.

Finally, Eastleigh Liberals seemed to have fun, judging by the leaflets advertising the annual summer fete (not all of which would be regarded as culturally appropriate in 2022).

Martin's narrative is relatively short but there are some useful annexes. Looking back to my doctoral research, I was

pleased to see comprehensive sets of local election results for the period, obituaries of some of the key players, and contemporary correspondence about local election performance. Tellingly, perhaps, the 1983 and 1987 elections are discussed in appendix 7. Martin stood in both elections and moved the Alliance into second place in 1983, paving the way for his successor, David Chidgey, to win in the 1994 by-election. Again, helpfully, Martin's election addresses are reproduced in full.

Martin has done future historians of the party an enormous service by capturing all of this important material, whether it be local election results or leaflets, in one place and providing his analysis of how the Liberals fared over the decades in which he has been a key player in Eastleigh politics. Given the price and the specific constituency focus, this book won't be for everyone; but I hope there are other local party stalwarts out there who can be similarly inspired and turn their files and their memories into publications which properly capture the importance of local politics.

Mark Egan is a long-standing member of the Liberal Democrat History Group, whose doctoral thesis was on the grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party 1945–64. He is currently interim CEO of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.