Scotland Act 2012, which materially augmented the initial devolution settlement was taken through both Houses of Parliament by Liberal Democrat ministers. Nor is there any reference to the International Development Act 2015, which created a statutory duty for official development assistance to meet the United Nations target of 0.7% of gross national income – a longstanding Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment which Michael Moore MP took up as a private member's bill in the House of Commons and was sponsored in the Lords by Lord (Jeremy) Purvis.

But in no way should that detract from what is a highly readable, informed and much to be commended account of Scottish Liberal and Liberal Democrat history. And Torrance is generous in concluding that Scotland of today being a more liberal country 'by temperament and belief owes something to the influence of Scottish Liberalism in all its manifestations between 1832 and 2021'.

Jim Wallace, Baron Wallace of Tankerness, was MP for Orkney & Shetland 1983–2001 and MSP for Orkney 1999–2007. He was Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats 1992–2005 and of the Liberal Democrat peers 2013–16, and Deputy First Minister of Scotland 1999–2005.

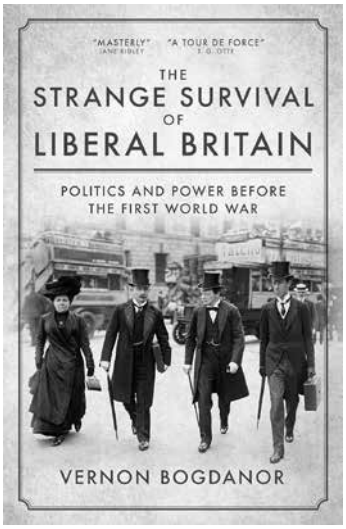
Strange Survival

Vernon Bogdanor, *The Strange Survival of Liberal Britain: Politics and power before the First World War* (Biteback Publishing 2022)
Review by **Iain Sharpe**

While the value of George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England* as a work of history has been disputed almost since its publication in 1935, it continues to cast a long shadow over historical writing. It remains the starting point for the debate about the decline of Liberalism and the rise of the Labour party. It has provided inspiration for many subsequent titles. In the hands of different authors Tory England, Labour Scotland and Liberal America, among others, have undergone *Strange deaths*. Others have proclaimed *Strange rebirths* of Liberal England and Liberal Britain, in addition to the *Strange survival of liberal England*. As if to complete the set we now have *The strange survival of liberal Britain* from the eminent political scientist Professor Vernon Bogdanor.

While his title is a play on Dangerfield's, Bogdanor's core argument that Britain's political, constitutional and parliamentary institutions were in relatively good health on the eve of the First World War is more directly in contradiction to Simon Heffer's recent *The Age of Decadence,* which portrays this era as one in which the ruling classes became complacent and lost their will to govern, leading to national decline. Bogdanor by contrast highlights the resilience and adaptability of Britain's political institutions in the face of serious challenges that might have threatened their stability.

While these arguments are in this reviewer's opinion well-made and persuasive, I would recommend the book to *Journal of Liberal History* readers not because I agree with its conclusions, but because it is an outstanding guide to the political history of Britain in the two decades before the First World War. At over 800 pages it is long enough to give detailed treatment to key events and issues and has the merit of taking the time and space to explain the underlying background to political controversies that were important in their time, but which can leave modern readers wondering what the fuss was about. It left me wishing this book had existed when I was studying the period as an undergraduate and postgraduate, often



finding that the background to questions like Irish land or the religious dimension of educational reform were never properly explained as specialised monographs assumed prior knowledge and textbooks merely narrated key events. Bogdanor does an excellent job explaining why such things mattered so much at the time.

The author states at the outset that there is an element of debunking in his narrative, although he suggests that this is the result of his research than part of his original intention. So, for example, he challenges the view commonly held (particularly by those with left-liberal leanings) that the delay in allowing women to vote was primarily down to misogyny. While acknowledging that misogyny was part of it, he sets out why this was a thorny issue. Both the main pressure groups that campaigned for votes for women wanted it on the basis of the existing franchise, which would have meant votes only for the small proportion of women who were householders, primarily spinsters and widows. It would have excluded almost all married women.

For the Liberal Party, enfranchising only these (mainly propertied) women would have benefited the Conservatives and thus been electorally damaging. So the issue needed to be considered in the context of other desirable reforms, including removal of plural voting and the university franchise, together with a move towards universal adult suffrage. While by no means exonerating those who delayed introducing votes for women, Bogdanor shows how devising a measure that would have granted this, addressed other demands for franchise reform and gained a majority in both houses of Parliament was more difficult than it appears in hindsight.

On other questions too Bogdanor takes aim at what he calls 'myths … that have become common currency, but are almost entirely mistaken'. These include the view that the 1899–1902 South African War was instigated by Britain, that the Labour Party was in a position to overtake the Liberals before the First World War, that Britain was on the verge of civil war in 1914 and that the country 'sleepwalked' into a world war that it could and should have kept out of. One might debate how far some these really are common currency – do many people really argue that the concentration camps of the South African war differed only in degree from those of Nazi Germany? But his arguments are always thought-provoking and mostly convincing.

In particular his defence of Sir Edward Grey's European diplomacy is compelling and persuasive, as indeed is his concluding claim that by the end of this period Britain had succeeded in maintaining and even strengthening its liberal political culture as it faced the 'terrible challenge of war'. If there is a common theme it is to recognise the dilemmas faced by those who governed, to 'approach their proposed solutions with sympathy for their difficulties' and 'not to use the advantage of hindsight'. This makes for a more generous interpretation of the period than that of Heffer or indeed of many modern historians.

Some may see Bogdanor's work as old-fashioned, a top-down survey of British politics with little or no 'history from below' or reference to wider cultural matters, and with Scotland, Wales and different regions of England mentioned only in passing. Yet the author is open about his methods and intentions, and there surely remains a place for such works within the spectrum of historical writing. Aside from its

narrative and key arguments, it is worth pausing to note that the book includes a useful set of maps, timeline of key events and an excellent essay offering guidance on further reading. Anyone seeking to enhance their understanding and knowledge of British politics at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries need look no further than this outstanding volume.

Dr Iain Sharpe studied history at Leicester and London Universities, completing a doctoral thesis on the Liberal Party in the Edwardian era. He was a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford for 30 years.

Wife of Lloyd George

Richard Rhys O'Brien, *The Campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George: The wife of the Prime Minister 1916–1922* (Y Lolfa, 2022)

Review by **Russell Deacon**

The 100th anniversary of the fall of the Lloyd George coalition saw a book published that gave a first-hand account of its inner workings, from no less than the prime ministers' wife, Margaret Lloyd George. The period that is covered in this book (1918–22) was the last point at which the Liberal Party was the driving force in British politics, even if it was only the section of the party headed by David Lloyd George. It was also the last period in Wales in which the Liberals were superior in parliamentary numbers to any other party – and in which one of their own projected a Welsh voice into 10 Downing Street for the first and only time.

There have been dozens of books written about David Lloyd George both during and after his life. *The Campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George*, written by Richard Rhys O'Brien from his own family archive and some additional sources, is the first book to cover the role of Lloyd George's first wife in detail. O'Brien's grandfather, the Rev. J. T. Rhys (JTR), was private secretary to Margaret, and it is through his papers that O'Brien brings to life much of the record of events and behind-the-scenes political thought of Margaret, David Lloyd George and the wider coalition Liberal Party during the period 1918–22.

The book is not just about the campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George; it also serves as a substantial biography of her. As such, it goes outside of the time frame on the book's cover on occasions. Thus, we are told that, unlike her husband, daughter, son and son-in-law, she was not elected as a member of parliament; but she was a constant political figure and also an elected one. She was a councillor and council leader on Cricieth Urban District Council and was also elected to many Liberal bodies and other associations for most of her adult life. She didn't confine herself to the council chambers, however; unlike LG, Margaret actively campaigned in by-elections for the coalition Liberals – some eighteen by-elections during this period. This was against the practice of the day, which was for prime ministers not to campaign in by-elections. This therefore meant that, during the October 1922 Newport by-election, which was central to Lloyd George's future as prime minister, he did not actually do any campaigning and it was lost without a single personal appearance by him – despite it being an underlying factor in the coalition ending.

There have been numerous mentions of Margaret in the many books on Lloyd George but normally as an appendage to her husband. This book, however, sets out her role often very independently from him. The book, for instance, cites a *Time and Tide* (a magazine produced by Viscountess Rhondda) description of Margaret as follows:

> It is perfectly true to say that, had she not been