

Even if Shirley was never a party leader, Julie Smith agreed, she led by example, inspiring and empowering other women politicians. Tom Nally recalled that when Shirley first became an MP, in 1964, there were very few women in the Commons and Labour's talented 'alpha males' were very difficult to survive with. The younger women politicians of more recent times had not appreciated fully how difficult it had been for her but 'they stand on the shoulders of people like Shirley who had to operate politics in a far, far more hostile world for women', he argued.

During the question-and-answer session, Tom observed that she demonstrated great integrity in deciding to leave the Labour Party, primarily because it had become very anti-Europe and she could not survive Harold Wilson-style contortions. 'That's politics but you also need politicians prepared to take a hit for integrity', he remarked. Mark Peel recalled that Shirley was paid well for appearing on *Any Questions* but often asked for the money to go to charity, without making a public point of her virtue. The day after she lost her Crosby seat in 1983, Shirley fulfilled an engagement at a local school, even though she was surrounded by tv cameras. Although the hard left denigrated and abused her as she fell out with the Labour Party, Shirley hardly

ever bad-mouthed other politicians.

Shirley's political style was summed up best by Julie Smith who grew up in Crosby and, at the age of twelve, worked on her successful by-election campaign in November 1981. Julie remembered her as an 'inspirational' campaigner and recalled her charisma and charm. 'Shirley would look you in the eye; whoever you were, wherever you came from, she would treat you as an equal', Julie said. She was willing to talk to anyone and could mingle with all sorts of people. Everyone called Shirley by her first name, she recalled.

Julie Smith recounted that a function after the

by-election, she posed a question to Shirley who responded, 'That's a very intelligent question'. 'Maybe that's because of the school I go to', replied Julie, who attended a private school. 'She didn't try to put me down', Julie remembered, and wondered 'how many politicians would just say, "I will accept what a young girl is saying"? So many would want to have the last word.'

'Shirley didn't – she inspired by her passion and integrity, not by putting people down', Julie concluded, 'and that's a pretty important legacy'.

*Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.*

## Reviews

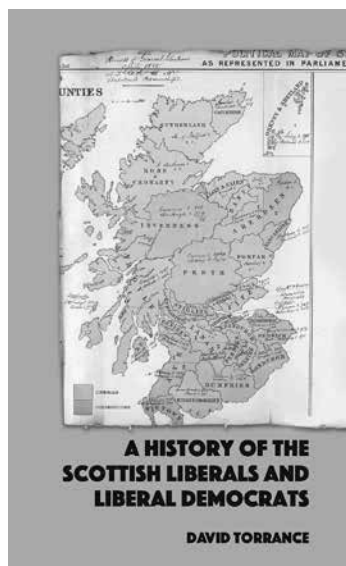
### Liberals in Scotland

David Torrance, *A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022)

Review by **Jim Wallace**

SCOTTISH POLITICAL HISTORY is being well served by David Torrance. Not only has he written biographies on George Younger, David Steel, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, he has also published books on the Secretaries of

State for Scotland, the relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Scotland ('*We in Scotland*': *Thatcherism in a Cold Climate*) and the relationship between nationalism and unionism in Scotland (*Standing Up for Scotland*). He has now indicated his intention



to write single-volume histories of each of Scotland's four main political parties, starting with the Scottish Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats.

Torrance notes that there is a paucity of literature on the history of Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats, and, with remarkable diligent research, he has remedied the position with the publication of *A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats*. As he, himself, observes, this omission to date is remarkable given that 'Party and nation became synonymous, with Scottish Liberal policy and thought influencing national identity and permeating public discourse' for ninety years after the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832.

It is also the case that Scottish Liberalism and Scottish Liberal Democracy have played a disproportionate role in the wider UK party. Four

of the last five Liberal prime ministers were either Scots or sat for a Scottish constituency. Between 1880 and 2019, nine of the UK party leaders sat for Scottish seats in addition to Lord Rosebery who sat in the House of Lords. Moreover, the inspiration and involvement of key Scottish Liberals in Gladstone's Midlothian campaigns had consequences for country and party well beyond Scotland.

Given that the history and timeline of the party north of the border parallels much of what was happening elsewhere in the (and so will be very familiar to Liberal historians furth of Scotland), it is very welcome that we now have a distinctively Scottish perspective on events and the ebbs and flows of Liberal fortunes. The book also sheds light on the sometimes tortuous organisational relationships between the Scottish party and the party organisation in London.

What struck me was how historic concerns still resonate today, and how certain themes recur. Admittedly some of the major issues of the nineteenth century such as temperance and disestablishment are no longer on the political agenda, but others such as education, land reform and especially home rule are still pertinent. In 1917, the secretary of state, Robert Munro, introduced education reforms which established Catholic education within the public

sector, an issue which still can prompt controversy today. He also proposed raising the school leaving age to fifteen and promoted directly elected education authorities. (Torrance omits to mention that they were elected using the single transferable vote.) The author quotes Munro's speech at second reading, where he says that the objective of the Bill is 'the better education of the whole people of Scotland, irrespective of social class, age, sex, or place of residence'. Any self-respecting Liberal Democrat today would heartily endorse that. In 1917, it was thought to be a bold and radical step forward.

Torrance also describes some of the tentative steps taken to promote land reform, not least the Smallholders Bill, brought forward in the teeth of opposition from both Tory and Liberal grandees in the House of Lords, but credited by some as being the reason why the Scottish Liberal vote held up in both elections of 1910. But, as Torrance observes, 'it proved a damp squib in practice'. It was not until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, ninety years later, that any serious land reform legislation was taken forward, principally by two Scottish Liberal Democrat ministers.

However, the author does describe one aspect of land reform which was implemented to some effect. Following the election of five

crofting candidates in the Highlands and Islands in 1885, Gladstone's government acted promptly and several Crofting Acts ensued. Not only did they ensure the return of four of the members to the Liberal fold in the ensuing general election, ninety-seven years later, when I fought Orkney and Shetland for the first time, I was invited to join the crew of one of the inter-island ferries for a cup of tea in the crew's cabin, where I found one of my election leaflets pinned to the wall with the words, 'Mr Gladstone's Man' inscribed underneath!

The urgency with which crofting reform legislation was brought forward clearly reflected electoral anxiety. But it was also a rare example of a specifically Scottish issue being afforded legislative time. In the decades leading to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the complaint was regularly heard that Westminster had little or no time to address Scottish issues. What surprised me reading Torrance's book is that notwithstanding Liberal electoral dominance in Scotland, this concern was nothing new. In 1869, Scottish Liberal MPs wrote to Gladstone 'protesting the management of Scottish affairs'. The author quotes a strongly worded letter from Rosebery to Gladstone in 1882 complaining that 'not one minute of Government time has been allotted to Scotland or Scottish affairs'. He also quotes

a handbook for Scottish Liberals published in 1900, complaining that Scottish affairs suffered from lack of Parliamentary time and being 'overruled by the votes of English members'. It has a very familiar ring.

Unsurprisingly, such discontent fuelled a theme which runs throughout this book, namely Scotland's relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. For a number of decades, it could not be wholly disentangled from the Irish Home Rule question. But Torrance shines light on how the issue was the cause of splits and disputation and the spawning ground for alignments and realignments among Scottish Liberals, Liberal Unionists, Scottish Unionists as well as internal party tensions among Radicals, the Scottish Liberal Association, the 'Liberal League' and the Young Scots Society. The machinations, motions, countermotions involving key personalities and peppered by splits over the Boer War make fascinating reading, albeit somewhat depressing.

And it didn't stop with the decline of the party after the First World War. Torrance documents how the rise of nationalism and the SNP led to many discussions and heart searching over what the relationship should be between the two parties which continued through the 1940s and into the 1960s, until it was clear that neither party was likely to cede ground for electoral pacts.

Many of those discussions took place after the 'Strange Death of Liberal Scotland'. The author documents the fall of a party which as late as 1910 could still command over 50% of the vote and fifty-eight out of seventy Scottish MPs to the party executive meeting of the 1940s when discussion was essentially about how to keep the life-support machine on. Torrance is to be hugely commended for his patience in wading through the minutes of these executive meetings. And he is to be commended for highlighting the role played by the unsung Lady Glen-Coats in keeping some kind of show on the road, thus facilitating a party renaissance under Jo Grimond, Johnny Bannerman and Russell Johnston, and ensuring that fifty years later, Scottish Liberal Democrats had the opportunity to shape the longed-for Scottish Parliament and participate in government.

If I have a criticism of the book (and I confess that I am not an objective bystander), it is that it doesn't cover adequately the role of Scottish Liberal Democrats in government, both at Holyrood and Westminster. It seems odd that when so much attention is (rightly) given to the Home Rule/devolution issue, no mention is made of the 2010 coalition agreement which stated, 'The parties agree to the implementation of the Calman commission proposal' and that the subsequent legislation,

## Reviews

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.*

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

---

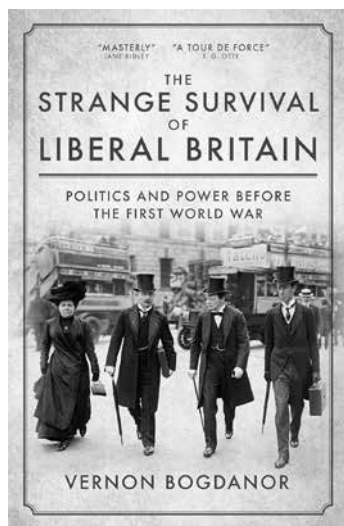
## Strange Survival

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

Review by **Iain Sharpe**

**W**HILE 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.



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

## Reviews

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.*

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

---

## 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**

**T**HE 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

the wife of David Lloyd George, she would never have been heard of (she is in no sense an ambitious woman), but it is also true to say that as things are she really matters; as the wife of the premier, she is in her quiet way, one of the personalities and powers of today.

The book indicates time and time again what an extensive campaigner and politician she was in her own right. Heading, running and fundraising for many charities and notable causes, by 1920 she had managed to raise some quarter of a million pounds, more than ten million in today's money – something which led to her becoming a Dame in August 1920. We later learn that Margaret Lloyd George in fact took on so much work that it could be the cause of irritation about her inability to attend engagements. One such instance was the Croydon Women's Liberal Association's putting down a motion of censure against Margaret – their president – for never attending their AGMs.

As well as correspondence between Margaret and JTR, O'Brien provides numerous examples throughout the book of Margaret's speeches and how they were amended against the final version. As a result, there are probably a hundred examples of quotable 'Margaret' that are, in many ways, equal to those of her husband. For example:

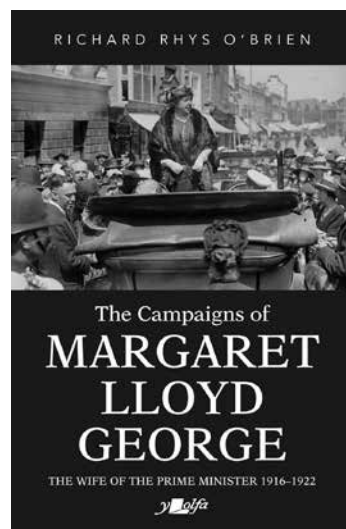
Power is one thing to possess, political wisdom is quite another.

Women have won the right to vote. We must now see that they vote right.

Both quotes are from a speech shortly before the armistice in 1918 to the Welsh Temperance Association in London, and the book is littered with many other notable political quotations from Margaret.

The overall style of the book is that O'Brien sets the historical context and chronological flow that underpins the excerpts from his various sources. We see campaigning in its full flow concerning a number of events that today seem of little relevance but a century ago were at the political forefront: the controversy over temperance in Wales, the events associated with Welsh disestablishment, and the campaigns against tuberculosis.

During the period in which this book is set, Lloyd George was gaining constant criticism for heading a coalition government that was centrally Conservative. Yet from the book we know that, when she addressed the Northern Council of Coalition Liberals in Newcastle in December 1920, Margaret declared, 'I was born a Liberal and I hope to live and die a Liberal.' To her, Liberalism had not been diluted. Yet the book spends some time on



the two different Liberal factions in parliament combating each other. This comes to the forefront in two chapters on the battle between the Lloyd George coalition Liberals and the Asquithian Liberals – and no other opponents – in the 1921 Cardiganshire by-election. Here coalition Liberal Margaret fearlessly campaigned directly against the Asquithian Bonham Carters, and a coalition Liberal victory was gained. Although the Asquithian Liberals retook the seat at the next election.

The gist of the book is that Margaret acts in a public political role as a de facto David Lloyd George, heading the coalition Liberals' political campaigns, including by-elections. For those studying the politics of this period, the book is a gem of first-hand experience. We can learn much more about the role women played within both the Liberal Party and

## Reviews

politics as a whole. It illustrates how political spin and 'false news' have been around for well over a century and were part and parcel of most political campaigns. We can see, for example, from first-hand examples the campaigning rhetoric that the Liberals were using against the Labour Party that linked them directly to the chaos evolving in the Russian Revolution.

The book indicates that, as well as being a key campaigning figure, Margaret also played a central role in a 'ceremonial, waving the coalition government flag sense'. As such, she was certainly the most political of the prime ministers' wives in the UK in the twentieth century. So, why didn't she become an MP herself? O'Brien also deals with some of the speculation around this in the penultimate chapter of the book.

As the title of the book indicates, this narrative is centrally about the 'campaigns' of Margaret Lloyd George through the correspondence with her private secretary, the Rev. J. T. Rhys. As a result, although you do get a clearer indication of her own personal political drive and motivations, particularly in the final chapters of the books, this is not a book that provides the reader with Margaret's thoughts about her husband or any other political or royal figures to any great extent. This is not a 'tell-all, revelations and scandal text': it is a detailed and valuable

account of not only how the first interwar coalition government sought to campaign for the Lloyd George side but also how one of the most 'forgotten figures' – Margaret Lloyd George – demonstrated that it was far from being solely a man's world.

When I wrote *The Welsh Liberals* in 2014, there was very little material available on the role of Liberal women in politics in Wales. This book would have been an invaluable source and would have helped balance some of the historical record that often portrays Welsh politics as almost totally excluding females prior to the

1980s. Therefore, those seeking a more balanced view of history will find this a fascinating and detailed read. There is also a pictorial element to the book, with many relevant photographs and some examples of the written material that O'Brien used as the central source for this book.

*Professor Russell Deacon is a visiting professor and lecturer at the University of South Wales. He is also chair of the Lloyd George Society and author of The Welsh Liberals: The history of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties in Wales (Welsh Academic Press, 2014).*

---

## Churchill in Scotland

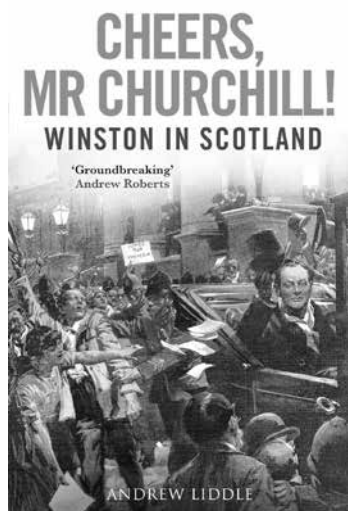
Andrew Liddle, *Cheers Mr Churchill: Winston in Scotland* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2022)

Review by **Ian Cawood**

**A**FTER HIS DEFECTION from the Unionists over Free Trade in 1904, Winston Churchill had been made a junior minister, following the Liberal landslide of 1906. With his gift for self-publicity, he had quickly been spotted by Asquith and was appointed as President of the Board of Trade in April 1908. Under the terms of a long standing convention, in order to enter the Cabinet Churchill had to seek re-election from his constituency in Manchester North-West,

which was by no means a safe seat. Seen as a traitor to the Unionist cause, the Conservatives put up the hard-right William Joynson-Hicks as an opponent and defeated Churchill, risking his political future. Immediately after the sensational result was known, the Dundee Liberal Association telegraphed Churchill and offered him the candidature in the east Scottish city. In this way, Winston Churchill began an association with Dundee that would last until his defeat in the general





election of 1922 which in turn contributed to his return to the Unionist fold in 1924.

That Churchill's Liberal years saw him having to engage with a distinctly Scottish political culture is one of the few aspects of his much-studied life that has been largely overlooked. Now Andrew Liddle, an Edinburgh journalist and former spin doctor for the Scottish Labour Party, has published a book that seeks to put a spotlight on Churchill's relationship with Scotland in the early part of the twentieth century and Scotland's relationship with the man chosen by a 2002 BBC poll as the greatest Briton in modern history.

Liddle's journalistic experience is evident in the quality of the writing. There are vivid pen portraits of Churchill in moments of despair, magnanimity and resignation which may be unfamiliar to those accustomed to

Churchill's depiction as a pugnacious and resilient bulldog. Liddle's engagement with political history in its fullest spectrum also shines through. Although particularly interested in demonstrating Churchill's sincere commitment to improving the lives of ordinary people, Liddle is no doctrinaire left wing historian. He offers the reader the perspective of almost all the politicians and activists who we encounter. Figures such as the fanatical Edwin Scrymgeour, the Scottish prohibitionist who stood against Churchill in every one of the six elections he fought in Dundee until he finally defeated him, come across as complex, principled characters. Scrymgeour's relentless battle with the brewing industry cannot be easily explained to a 21<sup>st</sup> century readership – especially to a Scottish one where the alcohol industry now stands triumphant as one of the chief sponsors of almost aspect of cultural life in the country, even while levels of Scottish alcoholism still exceed those of most other western European nations – but Liddle succeeds in eliciting admiration for the only MP to be elected on a prohibitionist platform in Britain's history and explaining how temperance was a crucial feature of Scottish radicalism long into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, there are places where it would have been wise for Liddle to have

supplanted his focus on personality with a little greater appreciation of the social and cultural context of the events in both Dundee and beyond. The electoral culture, about which we hear so much, changed significantly between 1908 and 1922, generally due to the expansion of the electorate and particularly because of the enfranchisement of women. There is a dramatic shift from the confrontational and frequently violent campaigns which Liddle describes Churchill fighting in pre-war Dundee to the post-war culture of press battles and public courtesy, yet this passes largely unremarked.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the decision of most Liberal and Unionist politicians such as Asquith, Bonar Law and Baldwin to avoid mocking and dismissing Labour opponents, for fear of exacerbating the class conflict which led to the violence on the streets of Glasgow in 1919 ought to have been noted as it has been ably described by the contributors to the 2013 collection, *The Aftermath of Suffrage*.<sup>3</sup> Not least because Churchill failed to take the same approach, frequently treating Labour and Communist opponents with equal disdain, and using language such as 'the foul baboonery of Bolshevism' to condemn both the Soviet regime and those on the left who showed any sympathy with the new regime in Russia.<sup>4</sup> Lloyd George complained

## Reviews

that, unlike the more pragmatic approach of his Conservative and National Liberal colleagues, Churchill had ‘Bolshevism on the brain’ and it was thus his shift to the right, in contrast to the national shift to the centre ground of politics, which contributed to his defeat in 1922.<sup>5</sup>

As a journalist, Liddle may also have appreciated the services of a good sub-editor who would have asked him to avoid repeating certain facts – we are told recurrently that Churchill was MP for Dundee for fourteen years, that he fought six elections in the city and that he regarded Dundee as a ‘life seat’. There is also a degree of repetition in Liddle’s style of introducing the episodes which comprise most of the chapters. We usually meet a figure alone, waiting, walking or travelling, which enables Liddle to paint a pen portrait of the figure, their state of mind and the fate which awaits them. When used initially to describe Churchill waiting in Dundee’s Caird Hall for the constituency result in 1922 which he finally lost to Scrymgeour, he effectively conveys Churchill’s state of apathetic resignation, but the approach does become a little wearing when, by chapter 25, we are told of the mood of the Dundee councillor who proposed giving Churchill the freedom of the city in 1943 (which the then Prime Minister controversially turned down). As an

academic historian, part of me recoils from any attempt to ascribe emotions to these real people, to treat them like characters in a (rather tortuous) fictional narrative. I can forgive this in Churchill’s case, as his correspondence, mainly to Clementine, has been unsurprisingly well conserved and does contain much detail as to his emotional condition. To claim that Councillor Blackwood was ‘anxious’ and ‘uneasy’ when he tried to persuade Dundee’s council to grant the honour to Churchill, however, does seem an attempt to fill a historical text with questionable invention.

Nevertheless, this is a highly readable account of an overlooked period of British political history during which, if one reads between the lines of Liddle’s text, a modern political culture emerged which has, at least until the takeover of Britain by the cabal of Oxford Tories in 2010, proved remarkably resilient.

*Dr Ian Cawood is Associate Professor in British Political &*

*Religious History at the University of Stirling. He is the author of The Liberal Unionist Party: A History (I B Tauris, 2012).*

- 1 See also T. A. Stewart, “‘Vote as You Pray’ – The Success of the Scottish Prohibitionist Party in Dundee during the Interwar Period’, *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 13:2 (2018), pp. 105–17
- 2 J. Lawrence, ‘The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War’, *Past and Present*, 190:1 (2006), pp. 185–216.
- 3 J. V. Gottlieb and R. Toye (eds), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics, 1918–1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 4 W. Churchill at the Mansion House, 19 February 1919, quoted in R. Rhodes James (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches 1897–1963*, vol. 3, 1914–1922 (Chelsea House Publishers, 1974), p. 2670.
- 5 George Riddell’s diary entry for 11 April 1919, quoted in R. H. Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War, November 1918–February 1920* (Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 153.

### Liberal Democrat History Group online

**Website** Details of our activities and publications, guides to archive sources, research resources: [www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk)

**Email mailing list** The fastest and earliest way to find out what we’re doing. Fill in the form at: <http://bit.ly/LDHGemail>.

**Twitter/X** A daily posting of Liberal events on this day in history, plus news of meetings and publications. Follow us at:

**LibHistoryToday.**

# Letters to the Editor

## Lib Dems in the Cities

I took out a subscription to the *Journal* only to find I was already part of living history.

Michael Meadowcroft's analysis of Liberal Democrat performance in the large cities ('Lib Dems in the cities', *Journal of Liberal History* 117, winter 2022–23) suggests the party's prospects in my own city, Birmingham, are 'depressing' – in spite of our making significant gains of four seats against Labour in 2022.

In discussing Birmingham, he might of course have ranged further in Liberal history as, of all the metropolitan cities, we are unique in having a large Conservative base dating back to the defection of the Chamberlain family from the Liberals. Indeed, the city has been run, unassisted, by the Conservatives in recent memory.

His numerical analysis implies that our gains in 2022 were purely localised and his overall analysis, reasonably, questioned what the Liberal Democrats in the 2020s have to offer the large cities and whether the party has the capacity to take power again in these places. The large electoral wards in Birmingham are certainly tough going for community politicians and even tougher for those seeking to follow party handbooks on electioneering.

However, the Birmingham gains were not just the result of localised 'trench' campaigns

but were underpinned by the city party's approach to the diversity and difficulties of urban life – and offer the party some indication of the direction it might take. Of the new group of 12, five are of Asian heritage and two are Muslim women. The Liberal Democrats were the only party to have a council candidate of Somali heritage. This diverse council group operates – and operated before 2022 – as an effective team, challenging Labour's neglect of the city's diverse neighbourhoods. The 2022 Birmingham manifesto was genuinely radical and clear-sighted and developed by the party's membership. For instance, we were the only party to advocate congestion charging – but with the proceeds becoming part of a programme of localised action in response to climate change rather than, as is normal in urban planning, going to big projects.

In the end, history will judge whether the prospects are now as depressing as Michael indicates. However, Birmingham was the birthplace of urban Liberalism and may be part of its rebirth.

*Jon Hunt (Birmingham group leader 2016–23)*

## Colin Coote

I was interested to see the reference to Colin Coote as a 'moderate coalition Unionist

MP' In K.O. Morgan's article on 'Lloyd George and the hard-faced men 1918–22' in the recent special issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 119, summer 2023). It is worth correcting the record, I think, to advise that Colin Coote was in fact the Coalition Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely, elected unopposed in 1918 and then losing to the Tories in 1922 when both the Conservatives and Labour stood against him. Interestingly, he had replaced one of Rosebery's sons, Neil Primrose, unopposed, at a by-election as MP for Wisbech in 1917 after the former was killed in action in Palestine. Coote was later editor of the *Daily Telegraph* between 1950 and 1964.

Coote produced a memoir called 'Editorial' which contains on pages 108 to 109 his description of the episode with Frank Hodges that Morgan referred to in the article.

*Malcolm Baines*

## Peter Hain

It is a pity that the *Journal* devoted so much newsprint to the article by Peter Hain ('Stop the Tour!', *Journal of Liberal History* 118, spring 2023). I found the article to be somewhat geared to self-promotion and interest and lacked any objectivity. When all is said and done, the protest was anything other than peaceful. Liberal principles do not encompass criminal activity.

*David Yates*

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# What have the Liberals ever done for us?

Launch of our latest publication – a concise guide to the greatest Liberal achievements, from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries.

Speakers: **Layla Moran MP, Sarah Olney MP, Wendy Chamberlain MP, Janey Little** (Young Liberals).  
Chair: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**. Special book price for meeting participants!

**8.15pm, Saturday 24 September**

Meyrick Suite, Bournemouth International Centre (conference pass needed)

*Those unable to attend in person will be able to view the meeting via Zoom – register for online access via the History Group website (<https://liberalhistory.org.uk/events/>).*



## William Gladstone and the Question of Slavery, 1832–33

*Continued from page 31*

- 96 John Gladstone publicly labelled Wilberforce a ‘well-meaning but mistaken man’, while Wilberforce privately complained of opposition from the ‘Liverpool Gladstone Connection’. John Gladstone, Letter to the *Liverpool Courier*, 5 November 1823, in *Correspondence between John Gladstone and James Cropper on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States of America* (West India Association, 1824), p. 17; [9 October 1827], Wilberforce Diary, Wilberforce Diaries Project, <https://wilberforcediariesproject.com/>. My thanks to Professor John Coffey for this reference.
- 97 3 July 1833, *GD*, 2:52.
- 98 William Gladstone to Andrew Fairbairn, 15 October 1893, in Lathbury, ed. *Correspondence on Church and Religion*, 2:333.
- 99 William Gladstone to Samuel Wilberforce, 25 April 1838, Bodleian Library, MSS Wilberforce d. 35, ff. 7b–8b.
- 100 Henry Manning, 13 December 1882, in Peter C. Erb, *The Correspondence of Henry Edward Manning and William Ewart Gladstone*, 4 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4:4.
- 101 William Gladstone, ‘1833–4 in the Old House of Commons’, 3 June 1897, in *PMP*, 1:54–55.
- Gladstone never imagined that he was ‘opposing’ emancipation. See *PMP*, 1:41.
- 102 William Gladstone, ‘Last Words on the County Franchise’ [1878], reprinted in *Gleanings of Past Years*, 7 vols. (John Murray, 1879), 1:178.
- 103 Cited in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 259.
- 104 Poly Stancheva and Diana Dukovska, ‘Bulgarian Ambassador Asks London Mayor to Rethink Renaming of Gladstone Park’, 21 April 2022, Bulgarian News Agency, <https://www.bta.bg/en/news/bulgaria/255087-bulgarian-ambassador-in-london-asks-london-mayor-to-rethink-renaming-of-gladston>