

mildly in favour of it. Another asked if the electoral decline of the Liberals between 1906 and the 1930s was more a reflection of the increased size of the electorate than of other factors. Bogdanor didn't think it was; the Liberals were not putting up enough candidates and the party was seen as divided and unhelpful on women's suffrage. Toye thought it was too late for the Liberals to present themselves as being on the side of women. There were other questions, including whether the Liberals failed because they had lost their nerve and whether Dangerfield should be read as serious history or not.

In concluding this report, it has to be said that by framing their talks in two distinctive ways, the audience was treated to an interesting, entertaining and rounded example of why Dangerfield's book still matters. Almost 90 years after publication, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* still has the power to provoke debate amongst academics and the public alike.

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speech and diversity during and after the Civil War and the Restoration, the emergence of the authoritarian Tories and the limited-government Whigs. After the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, Andrew Loader explains in the essay on Human Rights, 'this developed into a broader philosophy of accountable government, equality before the law and religious tolerance.' Faced with the corruption of 18th century parliamentary politics, the radical MP John Wilkes introduced the first electoral reform bill into Parliament in 1776. Entrenched opposition from government and peers, and the wars with revolutionary France, meant that fears of public disorder, as well as the skills of the Whig government, carried the first Reform Bill through Parliament in 1832. Tony Little sketches the successive campaigns to extend voting rights and regulate elections, against Conservative resistance that remains today.

There follow contributions on government reform, gender equality, internationalism, the economy, education, welfare, health and the environment, with a Timeline appendix that runs from the Exclusion Crisis in

Reviews

Liberal achievements

What Have the Liberals Ever Done For Us? 350 years of Liberal and Liberal Democrat achievements (Liberal Democrat History Group, 2023)

Review by William Wallace

The English history I was taught as an undergraduate (and it was very English, with few references to Scotland, let alone Ireland) didn't tell me much about the competing traditions of Liberalism, Conservatism and socialism, and very little about the domestic achievements of past British governments. Those who haven't specialised in History will have gathered even less on the threads of our political history that focus on policy rather than leadership. So this 50-page collection of essays on Whig, Liberal and now Liberal Democrat shaping

of British policy in a range of fields will be welcome to party members and sympathisers.

When I joined the Liberal Party the sad comment was that the Liberals were full of good ideas, from which the other parties would pinch the best and claim them as their own. Listening to Jeremy Hunt as Chancellor claim credit for the Conservatives for taking so many lower wage earners out of income tax shows that this habit has not disappeared. These essays, however, take us far further back, starting with the vigorous debates on liberty, freedom of



Reviews

1678 to the passage of Wendy Chamberlain's Carer's Leave Act in 2023. We are reminded of Harriet Taylor's and John Stuart Mill's shared commitment to equal rights for women, David Steel's achievement in the legalisation of abortion, and the work of many in establishing full gay rights; and of the commitment to international cooperation and law that stretches from Gladstone's campaign for Italians against the Austrian Empire and Bulgarians against the Ottomans to Paddy Ashdown's support for the Bosnians and Charles Kennedy's opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

Few remember the battles Liberals undertook to provide education for all, 'because education is so important to the Liberal belief in individual liberty'. More will be familiar with the Liberal record on health and welfare, from the achievements of the reforming Liberal government before the First World War to the influence leading Liberals exerted over the post-World War Two reforms. Duncan Brack's final

contribution details the growing importance of environmental issues in Liberal thinking from the 1970s on, and the real difference Liberals made in government between 2010 and 2015, when energy and environment policies became – according to Nick Clegg – 'the biggest source of disagreement in the coalition'.

Chapters on the economy and on health and welfare note the evolution of Liberal assumptions on the size and role of the state. In the 1850s, when the largest fields for government spending were the army and navy, and one of the largest sources of revenue customs duties, 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform' went easily together. As Liberal local governments set about improvements in water supply, public health and housing, local taxes rose. 'New' Liberals, from the final years of the 19th century on, accepted the need for more active government and higher national and local spending. I would like to have read a little more about the achievements of Liberals in local government in those decades. What

Tories called 'municipal socialism' was in practice social and economic improvement, by local leaders in cooperation with local companies and citizens. At a time when local government in England is close to collapsing, we need to reassert that active government works best when managed as close to those it affects as possible.

Younger and newer party members would also have benefitted from more explicit reference to the difference between economic liberalism and social liberalism – a divide which still marks British politics. Neil Stockley provides an excellent overview of Keynes' contribution to economic policy and planning, but does not mention the libertarian anti-state Liberals who emerged from the authoritarian threats of World War Two, and still inhabited the edges of our party and tradition many years later. Social liberalism and social democracy have blended together, as libertarians have gone off to capture right-wing parties in the UK and the

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United States. I would also like to have read more on Liberal experiments with mutuals, co-ownership and profit-sharing, ideas which Jo Grimond and those around him thought central to a modified market system but which we currently neglect. In 50 pages, however, this is a tightly-packed history of

Liberal achievements in politics and government, which I warmly recommend.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) is a member of the *Journal of Liberal History* editorial board. He is currently Liberal Democrat Cabinet Office spokesman in the Lords.

addition to developing a love of Germany (costing him dear in 1915) he met Hermann Lotze, professor of philosophy.

Lotze taught him how he could be reconciled with his evangelical parents, reworking the Christian tradition compatibly with German intellectual trends. Thus emerged the foundations of Haldane's philosophy of life. (Appropriately, 'Lotse' is German for 'pilot' or 'guide').

Lotze's school of philosophy was Idealism. At its heart lay the higher values of life and recognition that intellect and spirit matter supremely. For Haldane, this philosophy was to be approached pragmatically. Educational reform mattered more to him than anything else. For this he would tirelessly evangelise.

Rationalism was the foundation of his way of thinking. His Scottish intellectual background, based on reason, stood him apart from the English empirical tradition of looking for what works. The philosophers who most inspired him, flowing from Rousseau and the Enlightenment, were Fichte, Kant, Hegel and Berkeley.

The essence of Haldane's approach was to identify a problem, research the facts deeply, devise a rational solution and then work tirelessly to turn it into practical policy which he could pursue with influencers to achieve change. He was always ardent to understand the viewpoint of others and integrate the best ideas to produce compromises – as long as his principles (values) were not undermined – which provided a workable solution.

Haldane was exceptionally willing, for a politician, to befriend political opponents, most prominently

Forgotten Liberal

John Campbell, *Haldane, The Forgotten Statesman Who Shaped Modern Britain* (C. Hurst & Co., 2020)

Review by Tony Paterson

What caused the polymath and philosopher-statesman who had played a key role in preventing an early German victory in the First World War, to be humiliatingly excluded by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith from the new coalition war cabinet in May 1915? It was, after all, the Liberal MP Richard Haldane who, after becoming War Secretary in 1905, had created the Territorial Army (TA) and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), making Britain ready to send an army overseas when war broke out in August 1914.

Why Haldane was nonetheless ousted from the cabinet in May 1915 is one of many fascinating questions which John Campbell answers with insight and fervour in his magisterial biography, *Haldane, The Forgotten Statesman Who Shaped Modern Britain*.

A biographer as devoted to his subject as Campbell is to Haldane risks lapsing into hagiography but, instead, this author hugs his hero so close that

the reader emerges almost feeling that Haldane (1856–1928), with his balance of values, evidence-based thinking, and consultation, is still alive, and wishing he was.

In the early chapters, Campbell traces his subject's formidable forebears, including the (unlike Haldane) reactionary Lord Chancellor Lord Eldon, who sat on the Woolsack between 1801 and 1806 and again between 1807 and 1827, and Haldane's patrician Scottish parents, both pious Victorians.

After struggling, in his teens, to fully embrace his parents' Christianity because so much feeling sweeping over Scotland left him hungry for a supporting intellectual foundation for belief, Haldane was spared from alienation by the transformative proposal of his professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, to send him to Göttingen University in Germany for a term.

This began in April 1874. The experience changed Haldane's life – and, arguably, in view of all that he subsequently achieved, ours. Here, in