

# Research Notes

## Chronology

Key dates in the life of William Ewart Gladstone  
1809–1898

Compiled by Tony Little

### Early Life

1809 29 December

William Ewart Gladstone born at 62 Rodney Street, Liverpool, the fourth son (and fifth child) of Sir John Gladstone, a merchant with West Indian plantations, and Anne Mackenzie Robertson, a frail woman with strong evangelical leanings.

1821–1830

Educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford: double first in classics and mathematics.

1832 13 December

Elected MP for Newark (Tory).

1833 3 June

Maiden speech defending his father's treatment of slaves on the West Indian plantations.

1834 26 December

Appointed Junior Lord of the Treasury.

1835 27 January

Appointed Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies (until 8 April) in Peel's short-lived ministry.

1838

Publishes *The Church in Its Relations with the State*, arguing the case for the role of the Church of England as a state church.

1839 25 July

Marrries Catherine Glynne (aged 27), daughter of an historic Whig family, at Hawarden.

1840 3 June

Eldest son, William Henry, born.

### 1841–46:

#### Peel's Government

1841 3 September

Appointed Vice-President of the Board of Trade. Gladstone joins Cabinet as President of Board of Trade on 15 May 1843, and carries the first general railway act in 1844, ensuring that poorer passengers are provided for.

1845

Resigns from the government over a grant to the Maynooth RC college, but rejoins in the Corn Law crisis, though losing his parliamentary seat.

1846

The government repealed the protective tariff on corn in response to the Irish famine, but is defeated shortly thereafter on a coercion bill. The Tory party splits between protectionists and Peelites.

1847

Elected MP for Oxford University.

1850/51

Death of his daughter Catherine (Jessy), of Robert Peel, of his father.

### 1852–55: Aberdeen's Peelite/Whig/Liberal Coalition

1852 16 December

Gladstone vigorously attacks Disraeli's budget, bringing down the Derby Government. Aberdeen appoints Gladstone Chancellor of the

Exchequer – reorganises the indirect tax system by maintaining the supposedly temporary income tax, reforms Civil Service.

1854 28 March

Outbreak of Crimean War against Russia in support of Turkey.

1855

30 January, Aberdeen resigns over the conduct of the war. Palmerston becomes premier. Gladstone resigns on 22 February.

### 1859–65:

#### Palmerston's Government

1859 6 June

'Formation' of the Liberal Party in Willis' Rooms. Agreement reached to bring down Derby. Palmerston becomes premier on 12 June and appoints Gladstone Chancellor of the Exchequer – raises income tax from 3d to 9d in his first budget.

1860

Cobden agrees a commercial treaty with France, and in the ensuing budget Gladstone greatly strengthens free trade and enhances his reputation.

1861

Gladstone introduces the Post Office Savings Bank Bill and consolidates all the annual financial legislation into the budget to ensure the abolition of the excise duty on paper in the face of opposition from the Lords.

1865

Gladstone defeated at Oxford University, but 'unmuzzled' he is elected for South Lancashire.

### 1865–66:

#### Russell's Government

Russell succeeds on the death of Palmerston. Government defeated over Reform Bill through splits in Liberal Party, and resigns on 26 June 1866. Derby becomes the new premier of a minority Tory government

and Disraeli introduces a new Reform bill which, thanks to skilful manoeuvring, becomes the second Reform Act in 1867. On Derby's death Disraeli becomes Prime Minister. By 1868 Gladstone is able to regain the initiative through a campaign to disestablish the Church of Ireland.

## 1868-74: Gladstone's First Government

Now MP for Greenwich, Gladstone becomes premier for the first time on 3 December 1868.

1869

Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland.

1870

Irish Land Reform. Elementary Education Act.

1871

Abolition of purchase of army commissions.

1872

Secret ballot introduced.

1874

The government is defeated over Irish University reforms in 1873 but limps on to the 1874 general election where it is defeated by Disraeli, who achieves a Conservative majority for the first time since the 1841 general election.

1875 13 January

Retires from Leadership of the Liberal Party, succeeded by Hartington in the Commons and Granville in the Lords.

1876 6 September

Re-entry into politics with publication of *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*.

1879 25 November

The First Midlothian Campaign – a new style of popular electioneering.

## 1880-85: Gladstone's Second Government

Elected for Midlothian, Gladstone becomes prime minister for the second time on 23 April 1880 and combines the office with the Exchequer. An unhappy government, most of whose members threaten resignation at one time or another, its time is largely taken up with:

- Irish land reforms and attempts to suppress rural violence against a background of obstruction of the House of Commons by Irish Home Rule MPs. Obstruction is reluctantly overcome by the now familiar guillotine.
- The Bradlaugh affair, where the MP for Northampton is refused his seat as an atheist and efforts to introduce an affirmation bill fail.
- Third Reform Act of 1884, which brings household suffrage to the counties as well as the boroughs. In debates Gladstone opposes votes for women,
- The Egyptian and Sudanese crises (General Gordon is killed at Khartoum in the Sudan on 26 January 1885, just before a relief force arrives).

1881 19 April

Disraeli dies.

1885 9 June

The government resigns after Tories and Irish defeat the budget. Salisbury forms the new government.

## 1886: Gladstone's Third Government

1885 November

A general election produces a hung Parliament: Liberals 333, Tories 251, Irish Home Rulers 86.

1886

27 January Irish and Liberals combine to defeat the Salisbury government on an amendment to the Queen's Speech calling for allotments for agricultural labourers ('Three Acres and a Cow'). Hartington refuses to join the government and Chamberlain resigns on 26 March over plans for Home Rule. Home Rule Bill introduced 8 April. Defeated on Second Reading (6 June) by thirty votes. Liberals, split into Gladstonian and Unionist groups, are beaten by the Conservatives in the resulting general election. 20 July Gladstone resigns.

1889 25 July

Celebrates Golden Wedding Anniversary in London.

1891 2 October

Newcastle Programme – a party, not prime ministerial, manifesto.

## 1892-94: Gladstone's Fourth Government

1892 July

Liberals win general election but with a smaller majority than hoped following splits among Irish MPs after Parnell's divorce. 15 August Gladstone forms fourth government.

1893

13 February Home Rule Bill introduced in Commons and passes Commons stages but defeated in Lords on 8 September.

1894

Gladstone refuses to accept increase in naval expenditure and resigns on 2 March; replaced as Prime Minister by Rosebery. Gladstone remains an MP until the general election of July 1895, which sees heavy Liberal defeat.

1898 19 May

Death of Mr Gladstone at Hawarden from cancer. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

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# Bibliography

## Gladstone: Further Reading

Compiled by Tony Little

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The following very brief list is merely a starting point. Most of the works listed have their own much more extensive bibliographies for the serious student.

### Published sources

*The Gladstone Diaries*: 14 vols: Edited by M. R. D. Foot & H. C. G. Matthew.

Detailed abbreviated daily doings. The skeleton on which Gladstone studies now hang, but not an easy read as they were intended as a personal introspection and ready reference of time spent.

*The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone & Lord Granville*: 4 vols.: Ed. A. Ramm.

Granville was Gladstone's closest political confidant and friend.

*The Prime Minister's Papers: W. E. Gladstone*: 4 vols.: Ed. J. Brooke & M. Sorenson.

Memos, mostly autobiographical, kept by Gladstone, for the record.

*Gladstone's Speeches*: Ed. A. Tilney Bassett.

14 key speeches covering 535 pages plus an 84-page list of all the major speeches!

*Midlothian Speeches: W. E. Gladstone* Ed. M. R. D. Foot.

A reprint of the key speeches of 1879.

*The Red Earl, The Papers of the 5th Earl Spencer 1835–1910*: 2 vols.: Ed. P. Gordon.

Princess Diana's ancestor was a Gladstonian Cabinet Minister; an insider's view.

*The Diary of Edward Walter Hamilton* (3 Vols): Ed D. Bahlman.

One of Gladstone's secretaries and later senior Treasury official. The view of another insider, blurring the

line between politics, the civil service and friendship.

### Background

*Nineteenth Century Britain*: A. Wood. A standard 'A' level textbook.

*Politics Without Democracy*: M. Bentley.

Inexpensive paperback which gives a brisk survey of the period with added perspective.

*The Palliser Novels*: 6 vols.: A. Trollope. Capture the mood, mores and something of the principal personalities.

*The Crisis of Imperialism 1865–1915*: R. Shannon.

Thought-provoking, poses the problems faced by successive governments and their answers to them.

*The Optimists, Themes and Personalities in Victorian Politics*: I. Bradley.

How the sometimes contradictory ideas which make up Liberal politics came together.

*The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*: Jonathan Parry.

How the system worked in its prime.

### Biography

*Gladstone*: R. Jenkins

Very readable but somewhat headmasterly approach by our former leader in the Lords. Draws heavily on the diaries and Matthew but with the insight of a practising senior minister.

*Gladstone 1809–1898*: H. C. G. Matthew.

Matthew has collected together the introductions to the diaries to form what is probably the best modern biography. Although the opening section dwells heavily on the inescapable religious aspects, do not be deterred.

*Life of Gladstone*: 2/3 vols (depending on edition): J. Morley.

Still the unreplaced classic, but a monument which lacks the personal insights and 'warts' expected of a modern life.

*Gladstone 1809–1865*: R. Shannon.

A competitor to Matthew on the early career. Long and detailed but not without humour. Volume 2 may be with us by the end of the year.

*Disraeli*: R. Blake.

Gladstone's chief competitor and antithesis. Infinitely preferable to the gossipy newer biography by S. Weintraub.

*Robert Peel*: 2 vols.: N. Gash.

Peel was Gladstone's first ministerial employer and the mentor who inspired the rest of his career.

### Politics

*McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book 1832–1918*: Ed. J. Vincent & M. Stenton.

The election results for every parliamentary constituency over the period, the psephologist's delight.

*British Parliamentary Election Results*: F. W. S. Craig (several vols).

The modern work of reference, more accessible than McCalmont but not subtle enough on party labels in the Gladstonian period.

*Elections and Party Management*: H. J. Hanham.

Political organisation and campaigning in the good old days before central organisation and *Focus*.

*A Diary of Two Parliaments*: 2 vols.: H. W. Lucy.

The *Punch* sketchwriter views the party combat; naturally stronger on

concluded on page 52

## A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

### No More Heroes Any More?

What have Liberal Democrats today to learn from Liberal heroes of the past? Who contributed most to the development of the party and of Liberalism? What common themes bind us together?

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**Professor Ben Pimlott**, Warden of Goldsmiths College and author of biographies of Harold Wilson and the Queen;

Chair: **Graham Tope** (Lord Tope of Cheam).

The meeting marks the launch of the Liberal Democrat History Group's major new publication, the **Dictionary of Liberal Biography**.

**8.15pm, Sunday 20 September**

Osborne Suite, Metropole Hotel, Brighton.

## Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Role

continued from page 35

Isles, 1865–1931 (CUP, 1996), and author of *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–80*, (CUP, 1992).

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I have further developed this analysis in my article 'Exporting "Western & Beneficial Institutions": Gladstone and Empire, 1880–85', in D. Bebbington and R. Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool University Press, 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> Cit. in J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1903), vol. 1, pp. 363–64.
- <sup>3</sup> See O. Ralph, *Naoroji: The First Asian MP* (1997), p. 92 ff.
- <sup>4</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 'Introduction' to *Gladstone Diaries* (1990), vol. 10, p. xc.
- <sup>5</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Midlothian Speeches 1879*, with an introduction by M. R. D. Foot (1971), pp. 123, 129.
- <sup>6</sup> D. Schreuder, 'The making of Mr Gladstone's posthumous career: the role of Morley and Knaplund as "Monumental Masons"', 1903–27', in B. L. Kinzer (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind* (1985), p. 230.
- <sup>7</sup> Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj: The New Cambridge History of India* (1995), III.4, p. 54.
- <sup>8</sup> For interesting parallels between Jamaica and Ireland in terms of ethnic conflict and the problems involved in granting self-government, see Gordon to Gladstone, 21 January 1882, *ibid.*, p. 84. For the general methodological and historical context see C. A. Bayly's masterly *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (1989).

### Bibliography

continued from page 51

personalities than issues. Other works by Lucy well worth sampling.

*The Literary Companion to Parliament*: Ed. C. Silvester.

A selection of articles, extracts and sketches covering the whole history of parliament – well worth enjoying in its own right. It has a chapter on Gladstone and is more easily obtained than Lucy.

