

publican, eventually teaching his daughter to brew it before she left for school in the morning.

Hamshire was acutely aware of the disparity of wealth and the problems it caused, his greatest criticism being reserved for the clergy, who, he thought, cared for the shepherd (themselves) more than the flock. There is no mention of any books that may have guided his thinking except for the Bible. Perhaps the Bible was all he needed.

In his late forties he wrote *The Source of England's Greatness and the Source of England's Poverty* under the pen name of 'a Carrier's Boy'. The book was intended as an autobiography but is more a collection of his thoughts, events in his life, anecdotes, articles and correspondence. He sent copies to leading figures and eventually met his hero, Gladstone. He was a Radical and a Liberal and also claimed title to the idea and phrase, 'three acres and a cow', often attributed to Jesse Collings MP. He complained greatly of underused and vacant farmland and he detested the system of the workhouse and poor relief. He even stated that if the government held land in trust, the rental income would permit reduced taxation. He was also quite aware that taxing land would make sure it was put to use. He offered opinions on all sorts of matters: you can read his thoughts on poverty, inhumanity, hunting, the clergy, magistrates, pollution and even the price of fish!

His next book, *The Three Great Locusts*, is almost a continuation of the first. The locusts' are the Tories, the Church and lawyers. There are more stories of empty stomachs and shoeless feet in a community that misused land. His proposal to celebrate the jubilee of Queen Victoria must be mentioned. He starts by quoting Leviticus XXV, demands restoration of half the common lands for the poor and suggests most humbly that the Queen give a million to provide the cottages the poor would need. Also included are his views on war, an international army and court of law. You can read about the meetings he attended and can learn the legend of 'Dog Smith'.

If Hamshire lived today I think he would have been active in local, if not national, politics. He lived in a time of great social, economic and industrial change, a period of reform, in which he represented the common man's growing awareness of his rights as a citizen who could help mould his own and others lives. He was a son of the soil and thus more aware than most are today of man's need of

access to land and the connection between land use and poverty. It is not all politics and poverty, though – read his thoughts on manure, the fashion of women pinching their waists and his warnings against smoking.

The book is well produced and is as entertaining as it is interesting. It can be obtained from David Stemp, 27, Netley Close, Surrey, SM3 8DN.

Plugging the Gaps

Duncan Brack et al (eds):

Dictionary of Liberal Biography
(Politico's Publishing, 1998)

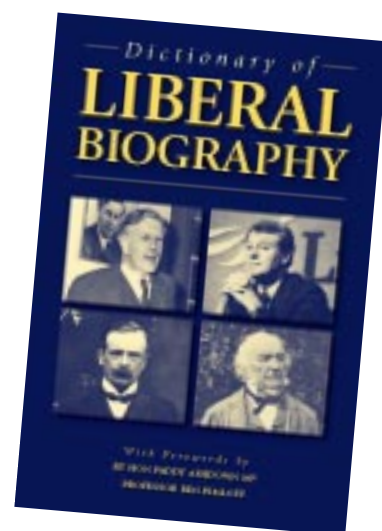
Reviewed by Chris Cook

All those interested in the history of the Liberal Party, whether they be historians or party activists, have suffered worse than their counterparts interested in the history of the Conservative or Labour Parties.

The origins and early rise of the Labour Party and its subsequent varying fortunes in the twentieth century have attracted enormous interest. Of the writing of books on Labour history, there seems no end. Similarly, the once-neglected Conservative Party has recently seen a spate of major historical studies, not only the completion of the multi-volume *Longman History of the Conservative Party* but also important individual one-volume studies by Alan Clark and John Ramsden. By comparison, the Liberals have been neglected. While the emergence of Victorian Liberalism and the triumphs of Gladstone, as well as the later achievements of Asquith and Lloyd George, are well covered, much of later twentieth-century Liberal history remains neglected. There are few studies of the 1930s, the dark days of the 1950s, or even such aspects as the post-war Liberal local government revival. Even worse has been the dearth of reference books devoted to Liberal history. Thus there

has been no single-volume guide to the key facts and figures of Liberal Party history or of the more general area of thought and action known as Liberalism.

The new *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* at least sets out to plug one very important gap. It brings together over 200 biographies of a variety of figures active in Liberal politics – not just in parliament, but in the higher echelons of party organi-



sation, as well as in the important area of local government, the scene of so much Liberal activism in the post-1960 era. Inevitably, there are always problems in drawing up such a volume. Who should be included? Who excluded? And what criteria for inclusion, especially amongst the living? These difficulties show up in one or two oddities: given the paucity of Liberal MPs since 1945, one might expect every Liberal in this period to be included, but Clement Freud is a notable absentee. He does, however, get a mention in one of the many valuable appendices, where his byelection victory at the Isle of Ely in July 1973 is recorded. This is where the wheels can begin to fall off carts of this kind: of the clutch of byelection victors in the period between the 1970 and first 1974 elections – namely Cyril Smith, Graham Tope, David Austick, Alan Beith and Freud himself – three are in and two not (Freud and Austick).

But there is much here to celebrate and enjoy. Julian Glover's entry on Jeremy Thorpe is a model not only of good sense and tact, but also achieves the difficult feat of writing exactly the kind of 'day before yesterday' history which is so hard to do well. So do many others. As Professor Ben Pimlott points out in his foreword, this volume reflects the invaluable nature of biography as a vital contribution to history and political thought. The bringing together of so many of the strands of activism and thought that have made up British liberalism since the eight-

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

Liberalism and Nationalism: Allies or Enemies?

Liberals and Nationalists have sometimes shared common aims. But how close are they? Are their basic philosophies compatible with each other? How has cooperation worked in practice? Why did nineteenth-century Liberals support nationalist movements while their twentieth-century counterparts have tended to oppose them?

In this year of elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, discuss the issues with **Donald Gorrie MP** and **Gordon Lishman**. Chair: **Ray Michie MP**.

8.00pm, Friday 5 March
Chandos Room, George Inter-Continental Hotel
George Street, Edinburgh

eenth century in a single volume can only stimulate further investigation.

Not the least of the achievements of the editor and his team of coadjutors was to do something that would have taxed the mind of almost any compiler of political dictionaries or encyclopaedias, namely to bring the multi-faceted and almost inchoate world of nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberalism into a viable and coherent volume. A volume in which the great Liberal thinkers of the past, Cobden, Bright, Hobhouse and the rest, share the platform – so to speak – with figures such as Trevor Jones ('Jones the Vote'), who re-established Liberal


credibility as an electable force in local politics, and Tony Greaves, who helped to mastermind Liberal 'community politics', is of immense value and richness without obvious incongruity. The group from the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* who were responsible for the original idea and for seeing a book with more than 120 contributors to a successful completion are to be congratulated, not least for prompting the question ever-present in this area, of whether a Liberal 'tradition' really is a viable organising category over more than two centuries. They make a very good case that it is.

As a book it is that increasingly rare thing, a pleasure to use and one which will repay much browsing, not least in the excellent appendices which could so easily have been stunted. How ironic and typical of the world of politics it is that the ever-changing political scene has thrown up so soon after the book's publication the announcement of Ashdown's departure as Liberal Democrat leader. Still, all the more need now for a well-deserved second edition.

Dr C. P. Cook is author of A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900–97 (Macmillan, 1998).

The Dictionary of Liberal Biography

is available for £20.00 (plus £2.50 postage and packing for postal or telephone orders) from:



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