

H. H. Asquith,  
William Beveridge,  
Violet Bonham  
Carter, Henry  
Campbell-  
Bannerman, Richard  
Cobden, Millicent  
Garrett Fawcett,  
Charles James Fox,  
W. E. Gladstone,  
Jo Grimond, Roy  
Jenkins, J. M. Keynes,  
David Lloyd George,  
John Locke, John  
Stuart Mill, Lord John  
Russell – or someone  
else: who was the  
greatest Liberal?

In 2002 the BBC conducted a search for the greatest Briton of all time (Winston Churchill won). Now, the Liberal Democrat History Group is offering *Journal* readers the chance to decide who is the greatest British Liberal of all time. You will find here concise summaries of the lives of fifteen potential candidates, selected by the Liberal Democrat History Group's executive committee and written by **Duncan Brack** and **York Membery**.

# IN SEARCH OF THE GREATEST LIBERAL

**E**NCLOSED WITH this *Journal* is a ballot paper, through which you can vote for your choice of the greatest Liberal (naturally, by the single transferable vote).

The top four candidates selected through *Journal* readers' votes will be presented at the History Group's fringe meeting at the autumn Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton. Leading politicians and historians will make the case for each one of the four, and *Journal* readers and conference participants will be able to vote for the final choice of the greatest Liberal.

At this stage, write-in candidates are not only allowed, but welcome. As you can imagine, it was not easy to choose the fifteen presented below, and we considered several other candidates, including Charles Bradlaugh, John Bright, John Burns, George Cadbury, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens, W. E. Forster, L. T. Hobhouse, Lord Palmerston, Samuel Plimsoll, Lord Rosebery, Joseph Rowntree, Nancy Seear and Adam Smith.

Feel free to write in your own suggestions, and vote for them, on the enclosed ballot paper. The only rules for inclusion are:

- The individual must have been active in the Liberal Party, or its predecessors (Whigs, Radicals, etc.) or influential on Liberal thinking.
- They must have been British, or active in Britain.
- They must be dead.

Inclusion in the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, or *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*, is a good guide, but is not a prerequisite.

## **H. H. Asquith (1852–1928)**

Herbert Henry Asquith was not just one of the longest-serving Prime Ministers (1908–16) of the twentieth century, he was premier of one of Britain's greatest reforming governments.

The Yorkshire-born barrister was elected Liberal MP for East Fife in 1886 and soon impressed party and Parliament with his remarkable debating powers. An able Home Secretary in 1892–95, he went on to become a leading

# RICH OF THE LIBERALS

Liberal Imperialist, but really made his name arguing the free-trade case against Joseph Chamberlain's championing of tariff reform after 1903.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1906–08, Asquith began to lay the foundations of a redistributive welfare state, taxing unearned income more heavily than earned, and using budgets systematically for social expenditure. He was the obvious successor to the dying Campbell-Bannerman, becoming Prime Minister in 1908. As commanding a presence on the platform as in the House, he went on to win the two elections of 1910 after the Tory peers threw out Lloyd George's 'People's Budget', and finally broke the power of the House of Lords, which had for so long been an obstacle to Liberal aspirations.

Asquith's government continued to implement the New Liberal programme of social reform, introducing old age pensions, national insurance for periods of sickness, invalidity and unemployment, government grants for maternity and

child welfare clinics, and much more. He might well have won the election due in 1915 had war not intervened. Instead, wartime difficulties forced him into coalition with the Conservatives and in 1916 he was ousted from the premiership by Lloyd George. The subsequent disastrous split in Liberal ranks enabled Labour to push the party into third place electorally.

Despite this unhappy end to his career, we should not forget his real achievements as Liberal Prime Minister, in some ways even more impressive than Gladstone's. Asquith's programme of social and fiscal reform changed the nature of the country – and of the Liberal Party – for good.

## **William Beveridge (1879–1963)**

The welfare state that emerged in Britain after 1945 owed its foundations to Asquith and Lloyd George, and its implementation to Attlee – but its design and structure were overwhelmingly the work of the great social reformer William Beveridge.

Beveridge had impressive achievements before his famous Report. As a civil servant from 1908 to 1919, he helped draw up the Labour Exchanges Act of 1909, the second part of the 1911 National Insurance Act and the 1916 Unemployment Insurance Act, extending insurance to workers involved in war production. In 1919, he left government for academia, becoming Director of the London School of Economics and then, in 1937, Master of University College, Oxford. He also found time to participate in Liberal Summer Schools.

When war broke out, he was put in charge of an inter-departmental inquiry into the coordination of the social services. He knew ministers were trying to marginalise him, partly because of his abrasive style, yet it was the report arising from this inquiry that was to make his name as the father of the welfare state.

*Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942) outlined a vision of society's battle against 'the five giants', idleness, ignorance,

disease, squalor and want. The report proposed a system of cash benefits, financed by equal contributions from workers, employers and the state, together with a public assistance safety-net. Underlying this system were three assumptions, further developed in *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944): a national health service available to all, tax-financed family allowances and a commitment to state action to reduce unemployment. These proposals were to form the basis of government policy for the next forty years.

In 1944, Beveridge was elected to the House of Commons as Liberal MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed but lost his seat a year later. Upon being made a peer in 1946 he went on to lead the Liberals in the House of Lords.

### **Lady Violet Bonham Carter (1887–1969)**

Violet Bonham Carter was the daughter of Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith and his first wife, Helen Melland. Despite the lack of a formal education, she was a woman of formidable intellect. She was a passionate Liberal, and her father's 'champion redoubtable' (to use the phraseology of Winston Churchill): she worshipped him and he depended upon her. After his fall from power she became his standard-bearer, discovering her own considerable gifts as an orator as she fought his election campaigns in Paisley. She continued after Asquith's death to be his most resolute defender, and the voice of Asquithian Liberalism.

She was also an important Liberal politician in her own right. She was a fervent believer in the League of Nations, an active member of the League of Nations Union, and a vigorous supporter of Churchill's anti-appeasement campaign, before embracing the European ideal after the war.

President of the Women's Liberal Federation in 1923–25 and 1939–45, in 1945 she became the first female President of the Liberal Party Organisation. She also stood unsuccessfully for Parliament twice, in Wells in 1945 and Colne Valley in 1951. In 1964 she entered the House of Lords and although by then seventy-seven, made an immediate impact.

A gifted orator, Lady Violet was a popular and charismatic speaker for Liberal candidates – including for her son-in-law, the Liberal leader Jo Grimond – throughout her long life. In the non-political sphere, she was a Governor of the BBC in 1941–46 and became a frequent broadcaster on both television and radio.

She had four children, including Mark Bonham Carter (himself later a Liberal MP) and Laura Bonham Carter (who married Grimond). The actress Helena Bonham Carter is her granddaughter.

### **Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836–1908)**

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman owes his place here to his record as a party manager rather than to his achievements as a Liberal Prime Minister. Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George may have achieved more glittering legislative successes, but Gladstone left his party divided and exhausted; between them, Asquith and Lloyd George tore it apart.

By contrast, Campbell-Bannerman brought the party back from one of the lowest points of its pre-1918 history, healed the divisions between radicals and Liberal Imperialists, fought off constant sniping from his predecessor, Rosebery, constructed a political alliance stretching from the free-trade wing of the Conservative Party to the nascent Labour Representation Committee, faced down a Liberal-Imperialist plot to send him to the Lords and, in 1906, led his

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party to its greatest electoral success ever.

First elected as MP for Stirling Burghs in 1868, Campbell-Bannerman held the seat for forty years and built a ministerial career of quiet competence. In 1901, as leader, during the middle of the Boer War, he bravely condemned the 'methods of barbarism' employed in the concentration camps of the Rand; denounced by the jingo press, and many in his own party, at the time, people gradually came to recognise that he was right.

Although as Prime Minister from 1905 to 1908, CB's legislative record was disappointing, with several initiatives destroyed by the Tory-dominated Lords, many of the foundations for later successes were laid by ministers in the cabinet he appointed and managed, by all accounts brilliantly. It may have been his successor who finally tamed the Lords, but it was Campbell-Bannerman's policy that Asquith adopted in place of his own original position.

Campbell-Bannerman was praised after his death for his courage, idealism, shrewdness and tenacity, and for his generosity and kindness; he was most frequently admired for his common sense. In holding his party together and holding it to Liberalism, he can be judged as one of the best and most successful Liberal leaders.

### **Richard Cobden (1804–65)**

For over a century, from the 1840s to the 1950s, support for free trade was virtually synonymous with support for the Liberal Party. It was Richard Cobden who first made it so.

Cobden helped found the Anti-Corn Law League in 1839, in protest against the high duties levelled on imports of grain. Designed to protect British agriculture, the Corn Laws inhibited the growth of the new manufacturing industries, which

were crippled in their ability to win export markets because of foreign grain-growers' inability to export to Britain. Employing lecturers, public meetings, pamphlets and direct electoral pressure, the League was in many ways the first modern pressure group. It was Cobden's genius that turned the economic arguments of Adam Smith and David Ricardo into a campaign for cheap bread, winning support from workers and manufacturers alike.

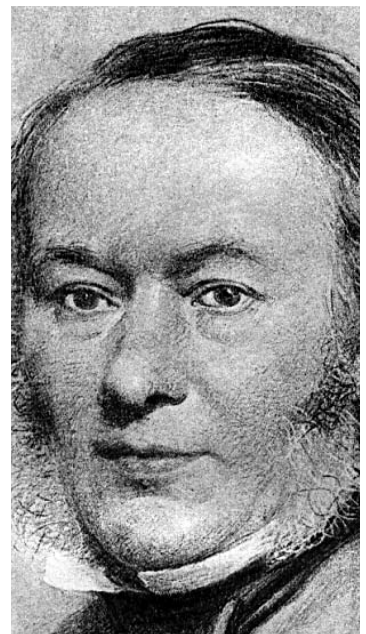
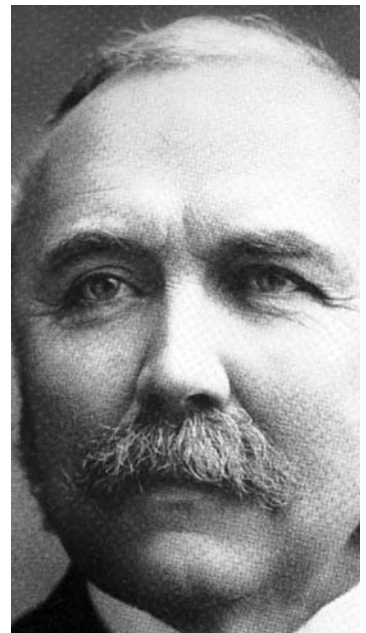
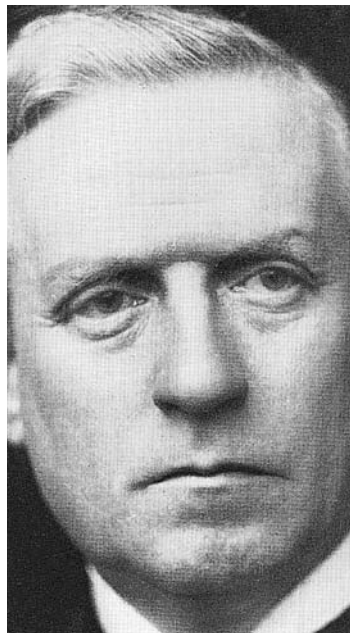
Cobden, however, always saw much more than economic justification for open markets. Abolishing protection for agriculture was part of the process of tearing down the remnants of the feudal order and putting an end to the special treatment enjoyed by the land-owners – part of the Liberal assault on privilege. Trade also promoted interdependence and a sense of international community, building links between peoples and nations and rendering conflict less likely.

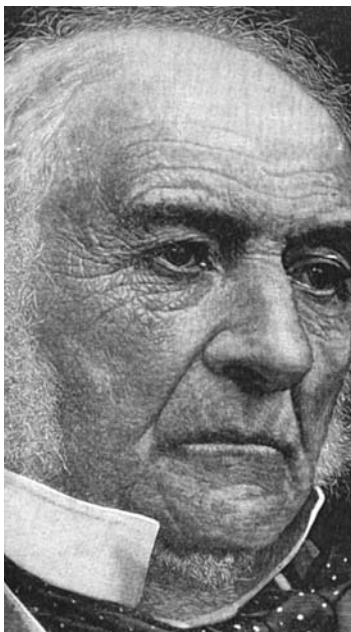
After the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, Cobden continued to campaign for peace and free trade, and against high military expenditure and high taxes. Although he negotiated a key trade treaty with France in 1860, he always refused ministerial office, preferring to stick to his principles. The cause of free trade underlined the Liberal landslide victory of 1906 and reunited a divided party in 1923; the vision of a world governed by principles and rules rather than power is still held by Liberal Democrats today. Cobden, more than any other individual, laid the foundations for this continuing story.

**Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847–1929)**

Millicent Garrett Fawcett was Britain's most important leader in the fight for women's suffrage. Although the militant Pankhursts are more generally identified with the struggle,

Right, from top: Asquith, Beveridge, Bonham Carter  
Far right, from top: Campbell-Bannerman, Cobden, Fawcett





From top: Fox,  
Gladstone,  
Grimond

Fawcett contributed more than anyone else to British women obtaining the right to vote. Valuing rational thought and her own privacy, she rejected the cult of personality that surrounded more dramatic and emotional leaders.

Fawcett began writing and speaking on the education of women and women's suffrage in 1868. Although only a moderate public speaker, she was a superb organiser, and by the early 1880s had emerged as one of the leaders of the suffrage movement; she became President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897. She ensured that the movement was active on a wide variety of women's causes, including campaigns against the white slave traffic, for better protection for low-paid women workers, and for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Finally, in 1918, women over thirty were enfranchised; ten years later, women received the vote on a basis of full equality with men.

Fawcett was a Liberal until 1886, when she joined the Liberal Unionists, out of opposition to Irish Home Rule. She helped to lead the Women's Liberal Unionist Association until 1903, when she broke with the party over its support for tariff reform.

In 1919 Fawcett retired from active leadership of the suffrage union, and returned to writing. She published two books on economics, a novel and several biographies and books on the women's suffrage movement. She worked to promote higher education for women, and helped to found Newnham College, Cambridge.

There are very few women in this list of great Liberals because until the mid-twentieth century, at least, politics was overwhelmingly a male preserve. Fawcett's career demonstrates a rare degree of commitment, perseverance and personal courage – and furthermore, she achieved her aims.

**Charles James Fox (1749–1806)**

Charles James Fox provides the link between the Whig inheritance of adherence to the supremacy of Parliament and the rule of law over the executive, whether monarchical or aristocratic government, and the Victorian Liberal belief in freedom and dissent. He had the courage to proclaim the freedom of the individual even in the depths of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

This is even more remarkable given Fox's aristocratic upbringing, early conservative attitudes and generally dissolute behaviour; although this left him with heavy gambling debts, on several occasions he refused offers of cabinet posts, with their accompanying salaries, out of principle. His adherence to the supremacy of Parliament, opposition to monarchical power and support for the rebellion of the American colonists were all decisive in developing a much more radical stance. By the late 1770s he was consistently one of the more radical Whigs, holding beliefs any modern Liberal would recognise – in power stemming from the people, in freedom of conscience and expression, in peace rather than war and in the possibility of reform producing progress.

It was Fox's misfortune to articulate these beliefs in an atmosphere of growing fear and repression, as the early ideals of the French Revolution gave way to the Terror and then to Napoleonic autocracy. Thus his periods in government were brief – he served as Foreign Secretary (Britain's first) in 1782, 1783 and 1806 – and his parliamentary motions were regularly defeated by large majorities. He achieved only two important parliamentary measures, a resolution pledging the abolition of the slave trade, and the 1792 Libel Act.

Although one of the best orators of his time, Fox was not a profound political thinker. Nevertheless, his instinctive hatred of oppression, and his courage in sticking to his principles, left the Whigs with a clear legacy of belief in freedom and civil liberties which was to become a defining feature of the Liberal Party.

### **W. E. Gladstone (1809–98)**

William Ewart Gladstone was the political giant of Victorian politics. He defined the Liberal Party of the second half of the nineteenth century: the party of peace, retrenchment, reform and – above all – trust in the people.

A minister by the age of twenty-five, he left office for the last time at eighty-five. He served as Prime Minister on no less than four occasions, three of them after his ‘retirement’ in 1875. He was the leading orator of his age, not only in Parliament but outside, regularly addressing audiences of 20,000 or more.

Originally a Tory, he was converted to the cause of free trade under Sir Robert Peel. As Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1850s and 1860s, he abolished tariffs, simplified taxation, ended paper duties to facilitate the growth of the press and established the Post Office Savings Bank. With other Peelites, in 1859 he joined with Whigs and Radicals to create the Liberal Party, and nine years later became its leader. Under his four premierships, the Irish Church was disestablished, the secret ballot introduced, the purchase of army commissions abolished, state primary education established and the franchise reformed and extended. He pursued a foreign policy guided by the ‘love of freedom’ and action through a ‘concert of nations’.

For Gladstone, politics was, above all else, about great moral issues rather than selfish interests. Hence his conversion to Irish

Home Rule – which, despite two attempts, he never achieved, splitting his party in the process. His preoccupation with moral issues also explains his opposition to radical ‘constructionist’ legislation, which could too easily destroy incentives for self-help and voluntaryism. Yet he was always a government activist willing to expand the role of the state, as a regulator (for example, in railway regulation, or Irish land reform), or as a provider where voluntary means were inadequate, such as in education.

In the time left over from office, Gladstone collected china, wrote on Homer and participated in the religious controversies of his time. He was a man of immense physical and mental energy, chopping down trees and reading books (20,000 of them, according to Jenkins) for relaxation. He moulded and embodied Victorian Liberalism. He was not only a great Liberal; he was a great human being.

### **Jo Grimond (1913–93)**

The most important post-war Liberal leader, Jo Grimond made a difference not just to the fortunes of his party but to British politics, helping to end the two-party mould into which it had settled. He took over an ailing party and transformed it into a formidable force. A figure of great magnetism and intellectual originality, he inspired a rare degree of affection amongst voters and activists alike.

Born in Fife, Joseph Grimond studied law and served in the forces during the war. Marriage to Violet Bonham Carter’s daughter, Laura, gave a boost to his Liberal commitment; he was elected MP for Orkney & Shetland in 1950 and leader of the party in 1956. Despite the party’s parlous condition – it sank to its lowest-ever level of five MPs in 1957 – he refused to accept that its long-term aim should not be power.

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Grimond’s idealism, ability to communicate and freshness appealed to the younger generation of voters, no longer deferential and class-conscious. He made the Liberal Party a respectable organisation to join, and attracted experts who contributed to a real renaissance in Liberal thinking – including entry to the Common Market, Scottish Home Rule, industrial democracy, and the abolition of Britain’s nuclear deterrent. Pursuing the realignment of the left, he positioned the party as a radical non-statist alternative to Labour. The stunning by-election victory at Orpington in 1962 seemed to prove his strategy right, and at the subsequent general election of 1964 the Liberal vote topped three million for the first time since the war.

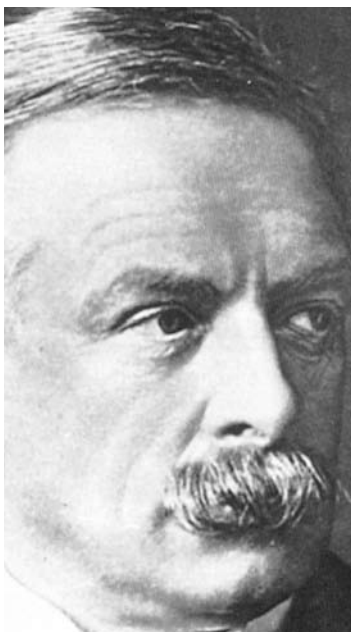
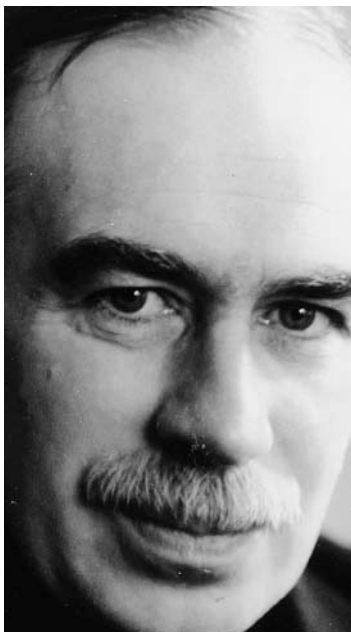
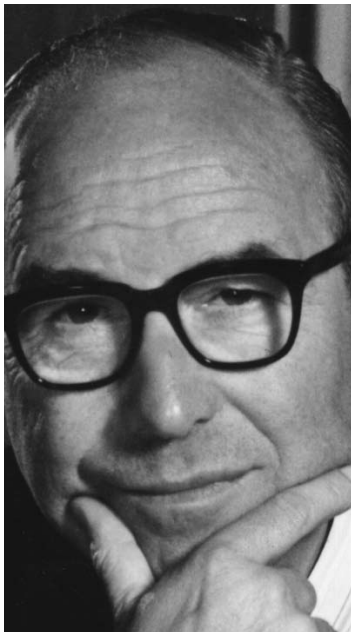
Although Labour’s success in 1966 postponed this hope for fifteen years – and led to his resignation as leader in 1967 – Grimond sowed the seeds of the realignment of the 1980s. His leadership not only rescued the Liberal Party from seemingly inexorable electoral decline, but, as Paddy Ashdown put it, established it as the party of choice for ‘the radicals and thinkers of British politics’.

### **Roy Jenkins (1920–2003)**

Roy Jenkins was the great reforming Liberal Prime Minister Britain never had. A progressive and effective cabinet minister, he played a key role in taking Britain into Europe and then founding the Social Democratic Party. He also found time to write several elegant political biographies.

After wartime intelligence work, Jenkins was elected as a Labour MP in 1948. He took the revisionist social-democratic side in Labour’s internal struggles, and became a leading figure after Labour’s 1964 election victory. As Home Secretary (1965–67), he was responsible for reforming the laws on abortion,





homosexuality, race relations and theatre censorship. In 1967 he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, where two years of tough measures restored economic stability.

Jenkins was always a convinced European. In October 1971, defying a three-line whip, he led sixty-nine Labour MPs to vote for EEC entry; he was one of the leaders of the 'yes' campaign in the 1975 referendum. He served as President of the European Commission in 1977–81, where he played a leading role in establishing the European Monetary System.

In 1979, Jenkins's Dimbleby Lecture acted as a rallying cry for all those discontented with British politics. He criticised the false choices, see-saw politics and broken promises of the two-party system and advocated electoral reform. Most crucially, he called for a new grouping to strengthen the 'radical centre'. Eighteen months later, he founded the SDP, bringing thousands of new activists into politics, and was its leader in 1982–83. After he lost his seat in 1987, he strongly supported merger, and then led the Liberal Democrat peers (1988–98).

Jenkins had a glittering political career. He was a stylish and eloquent performer in Parliament, on television, and in print. Frequently described as 'grand', he saw himself as a 'perpetual radical'. He could have been a Labour Prime Minister if he had not stuck to his vision and principles; instead, he changed the political landscape of Britain.

**John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)**

As well as Liberal politicians, Liberal thinkers have helped to shape government in twentieth-century Britain. Greatest among them was Keynes, the most influential and important economic thinker of the century, whose ideas came to underpin

Far left, from top: Jenkins, Keynes, Lloyd George  
Left, from top: Locke, Mill, Russell

Western governments' post-war economic strategy.

Primarily a Cambridge academic, John Maynard Keynes worked for the government in both wars. During the First World War he advised Lloyd George on war finance and the Versailles peace settlement, resigning over its punitive terms. In the Second, he was the leading economic adviser to the Treasury (1940–46), and headed the British delegation to the Bretton Woods talks in 1944, which laid the foundations for the post-war international financial and trading system.

His economic works include his *Tract on Monetary Reform* (1923) and *On Money* (1930), still regarded as his major works by many monetary economists. His most famous work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), effectively invented macroeconomics. He showed that the price system could not be relied upon to achieve an equilibrium that made full use of human resources, and argued that governments should manage the economy to eliminate unemployment, especially by running budget deficits. The book reads like a summary of all economics written subsequently though, like the Bible and the works of Karl Marx, its very richness has led to thousands of articles and books disputing its meaning.

Keynes was also an active Liberal. He was a pioneer of the Summer School movement, a member of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry, which produced *Britain's Industrial Future*, the famous 'Yellow Book' (1928), and part-author of the 1929 Liberal manifesto and of the accompanying *Can Lloyd George Do It?*, which explained the Liberal Party's plans to cure unemployment.

Like all great Liberals, Keynes was essentially an optimist. Through his brilliant insights he showed how economics could be used to help create and maintain the conditions in which human

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beings could live civilised, creative and passionate lives.

#### **David Lloyd George (1863–1945)**

David Lloyd George is one of the greatest and, at the same time, one of the most controversial, politicians in the history of the Liberal Party. He played a central role in the great reformist administrations of 1905–16. As party leader (1926–31), he introduced Keynesian economics to the Liberal programme and to British politics. But his period as Prime Minister, from 1916–22, split the party into rival factions, presaging its catastrophic decline.

Lloyd George grew up in North Wales in humble circumstances, and qualified as a solicitor before winning election as MP for Caernarfon Boroughs in 1890. He rapidly earned a reputation as a radical, and was prominent in the opposition to the Boer War. He entered the cabinet first as President of the Board of Trade and then as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He established himself as a dynamic, radical force in the government, introducing the major Liberal social reforms, including old age pensions, National Insurance and the 'People's Budget' of 1909.

He served as Minister of Munitions and then Secretary of State for War in the first wartime coalition. In December 1916, after mounting concern over Asquith's ineffectual leadership, he found himself facing irresistible pressure to take office as Prime Minister. He proved an exceptionally able war leader, but the split of 1916 gravely wounded the Liberal Party and led to its eclipse by Labour.

Succeeding Asquith as leader in July 1926, Lloyd George used his famous Fund (accumulated from the sale of honours) to finance a series of policy committees. These produced, most famously, the 'Yellow Book', *Britain's Industrial Future*, which

proposed a radical programme of state intervention in the economy to reduce unemployment. Under his inspirational leadership, the party enjoyed a new-found energy and vitality – but was too firmly established in third place to be able to break through the barriers of the electoral system.

One of the most dynamic and brilliant politicians ever to lead the Liberal Party and become premier, Lloyd George remains a figure of controversy; but his achievements, first in implementing the New Liberal programme of social reform, and then in ensuring that the Liberal Party remained committed to social liberalism, are real and lasting.

#### **John Locke (1632–1704)**

Often described as the patron saint of liberalism, John Locke's beliefs in the natural rights of individuals, limits on the powers of the state, and the rule of law, underpin all subsequent Liberal thought.

Born into a Puritan and Parliamentary family, in 1666 Locke became a protégé of the Earl of Shaftesbury, a leading opponent of Charles II and the succession of the Duke of York (later James II). Locke's early work set out the case for constitutional constraints on executive power, and the right to resist tyrannical government. After Shaftesbury was accused of planning revolution, Locke fled abroad to Holland in 1683. Six years of exile proved fruitful; he had time to complete the works published, after the overthrow of James II in 1688, as *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1693).

The most important statement of Locke's politics is contained in the *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). The first treatise argued that the doctrine of the divine right of kings had no Biblical warrant. The second described the emergence and limits of



legitimate political authority, starting from the notion that all men were by nature equal. Given that God did not appoint human authority, there could be no rightful basis for political power other than consent. Unusually for his era, Locke also argued for religious toleration; since personal salvation was the result of belief, coercion could never lead to salvation as it was unable to generate genuine conviction.

Locke's faith in the ennobling powers of knowledge, and his belief in natural rights, toleration and the limits of legitimate authority justify his reputation as the first philosopher of the Enlightenment. In developing the Whig ideology of opposition to absolutism and defence of limited government, Locke formulated the classic expression of liberalism, which was to inspire not just generations of Whigs and Liberals, but also the shapers of the American and French Revolutions.

### John Stuart Mill (1806–73)

Philosopher, economist, journalist, political writer, social reformer, and, briefly, Liberal MP, John Stuart Mill is one of the most famous figures in the pantheon of Liberal theorists, and the greatest of the Victorian Liberal thinkers.

Eldest son of the Scottish utilitarian philosopher James Mill, John Stuart's works have had far more lasting interest. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) he voiced his unease concerning the excessive power and influence of the state; people understood their own business better than government did. However, he acknowledged a clear role for the state, for example in regulating natural monopolies.

He is best known for his masterpiece, *On Liberty* (1859), which emphatically vindicated individual moral autonomy, and celebrated the importance of originality and dissent. Although generations of Liberals

have used his arguments to oppose state authoritarianism, in fact Mill devoted most of the work to arguing against middle-class conformism, which stultified opposition and a critical cast of mind.

In *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) Mill expounded his doctrine of democracy, emphasising the importance of local government. Putting his beliefs into practice, he served as Liberal MP for Westminster from 1865 to 1868, where he argued for proportional representation and the extension of suffrage to women householders – a stance he developed in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which remains the only feminist classic written by a man. He maintained that social reform, rather than repression, was the cure for civil unrest in Ireland, and argued for the impeachment of the brutal Governor Eyre of Jamaica. Mill's defence of civil rights and racial equality helped to lose him his seat in 1868.

Mill's intellectual achievements were unmatched in Victorian England. His defence of individual liberty can still set the terms of debate today, for example over freedom of speech. This helps to explain why *On Liberty* is the symbol of office of the President of the Liberal Democrats and, what is more, the symbol of liberalism itself.

### Lord John Russell (1792–1878)

Aptly described as 'the last Doge of Whiggism', Lord John Russell can equally be considered the first Liberal Prime Minister, embodying in his own attitudes the mid-Victorian transition from traditional Whiggery to Gladstonian Liberalism.

Born into one of the leading Whig dynasties, Russell entered Parliament in 1813 and remained active for fifty-five years, more than half of them as a cabinet minister, including two spells as Prime Minister (1846–52 and

1865–66). He also found time for many literary works, including biography, history and poetry.

Like his hero Fox, Russell believed that there was a greater threat to liberty from the abuse of power than from the masses. He led the reformist wing of the Whigs in the 1820s, and helped draft the Great Reform Act of 1832. He distrusted religious dogma, and was committed to a pluralist politics in which Dissenters, Catholics and Jews had full political rights.

Russell also saw the need for a bold and systematic social policy to tackle the problems of population growth and urbanisation. As Home Secretary (1835–39) he supervised key reforms of the criminal law, policing and prisons, cut stamp duty to a penny, introduced the penny post, and instituted state inspection and support of public education. As Prime Minister in 1846–52, he extended state support for education and passed important public health and factory reform measures.

Sometimes outmanoeuvred by his Whig colleague Palmerston, he shared with the latter a pride in British liberal constitutional traditions which convinced him that political leaders had a duty to promote Britain's libertarian values abroad. His support for Italian unification in 1859 provided the catalyst for the coming-together of Whigs, Radicals and Peelites to form the Liberal Party.

Russell was the archetypal Liberal of the mid-nineteenth century, imbued with Whiggish constitutionalism, a deep sense of Christian responsibility and the optimistic belief in progress that was such a hallmark of the Victorian Liberal outlook.

*Remember to return your ballot paper by Friday 27 July. You can also submit your vote by email, to [journal@liberalhistory.org.uk](mailto:journal@liberalhistory.org.uk). For full instructions, see the ballot paper.*

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