

WILLIAM D THE INDIAN

William Digby, the first secretary of the National Liberal Club, was also a radical political organiser and agitator for India. One of his many exposures of Indian poverty was referred to as 'one of the most terrible indictments ever probably written of a governing race'. He assisted Charles Bradlaugh, and acted as election agent for Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Asian elected to Parliament. **Dr Mira Matikkala** examines his life and interests.



DIGBY AND THE QUESTION

WILLIAM DIGBY was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in 1849.

He began his journalistic career early, becoming an apprentice on a small local newspaper in 1864. In 1871, he left England for Ceylon, to become the sub-editor on the *Ceylon Observer* in Colombo. In Ceylon he soon became involved in a major temperance campaign, and another campaign for the abolition of food taxes brought him honorary membership of the Cobden Club in 1876.

The following year Digby settled in India, where he became the editor of the influential daily *Madras Times*. The years of severe famine which followed soon led him to question the rationale of British rule in India. He wrote his first major pamphlet, the two-volume *Famine Campaign in Southern India*, in 1878, and used the *Madras Times* extensively, as well as *The Times* in London, to stir up both the government and the British public. As a result,

the Indian government began to organise public works and food shipments to Southern India, and a substantial relief fund was launched in London. The Indian famine was the turning-point in Digby's life, leading him to devote himself to Indian reform until his death.

His wife having died in India, Digby returned to England in 1879. For the next few years he edited first the *Liverpool and Southport Daily News* and then the *Western Daily Mercury* at Plymouth. Then, in November 1882, he was elected as the first secretary of the newly-established National Liberal Club.

After months of preparatory work, the Club was established at a meeting on 16 November 1882. According to an active member, the meeting 'was largely attended by leading Liberals from all parts of the country ... On 29 November, Mr. William Digby was appointed secretary. Success immediately followed. By 31 December 1882, the list of original members was closed with more than 2,500

names.¹ According to Digby, five months later the figure was nearly 3,900.²

However, it seems that Digby was somewhat too dynamic for the secretaryship. The Club was not meant to be anything other 'than a social meeting-place for progressive politicians',³ but Digby was far from satisfied with this. In June 1883 he wrote to Herbert Gladstone:

I thank you very much for your detailed criticisms of the suggestions I put on paper respecting the political work of the Club. Those criticisms are, in the main, adverse to my suggestions. ... If the National Liberal Club is to be a social club merely ... I, for one, should be grievously disappointed, and should regret having given up journalism (where now and then I could be of some service) for the secretaryship. ... I could add page upon page of conversations I have had with leading Liberals from all parts of the country. They (the leading Liberals) look,

Digby's portrait at the National Liberal Club, by J. C. Forbes, presented to the Club in 1905 (courtesy of Simon J. Roberts, secretary of the National Liberal Club)

with eager expectancy, to the Club to become a central party organisation, and are prepared to support it accordingly. If it is merely 'social', then, I am convinced, there will be a great falling off in numbers and in influence.⁴

Nevertheless, Digby did not have his way. When he informed Herbert Gladstone of his resignation four years later he bitterly acknowledged 'that what the Club wants is a thoroughly capable hotel manager'.⁵

'Indian Problems for English Consideration'

Digby's criticism of British rule in India sprang from humanitarian grounds, having its roots in the famine, but in the 1880s he extended it to broader themes: first demanding full economic and racial equality, soon also calling for representative government for India, and, finally, advocating full self-government.

He began his Indian agitation in Britain with a pamphlet entitled *Indian Problems for English Consideration*, published by the National Liberal Federation in 1881. Digby argued that Indian reform was 'a Liberal duty', and defined India as 'a larger Ireland'. He predicted serious troubles in India, unless Englishmen and Indians would 'be brought to know one another better, and to understand each other's position to a fuller extent than they now do'.⁶ He testified that 'our fellow-subjects in the east are like-minded with ourselves in all that constitutes good citizenship and law-abidingness'.⁷

He also insisted, bluntly, that the British had failed to govern India properly. He argued that there were 'forty million starving' and nine million had 'died from want of food' under the 'crushing weight of administration'. Moreover, Digby asserted that the native Indian administration functioned much better

'If the National Liberal Club is to be a social club merely ... I, for one, should be grievously disappointed'.

in times of famine than the British one. This was, he argued, because native states availed themselves of local Indian experience, whereas the British did not.⁸

Furthermore, Digby challenged the widely-held view 'that India had no cause of complaint against Great Britain, as she was not made to contribute anything to this country'. While acknowledging that no direct contribution had been paid, Digby stressed that indirectly England was 'draining India, not simply of its surplus, but actually of its very life-blood'. As an example of this unequal partnership, Digby stated that on seven occasions India had been made to pay for English wars: twice for China and New Zealand, and once each for Crimea, Persia, and Abyssinia. In all these imperial undertakings, Britain had borrowed Indian troops and India had paid. On the other hand, when reinforcements had been sent from Britain to India in the 1840s and 1857, India had been made to pay 'every fraction of the pay of the troops from the moment they left England'.⁹

Most importantly, Digby was a strong advocate of John Bright's scheme for decentralised government in India as the answer to India's difficulties. Bright had insisted since 1858 that it was impossible for one man, the Governor-General or Viceroy, to rule India. Thus, the country should be divided into five or six presidencies, equal in rank and each under a separate governor who would be in direct communication with the Secretary of State for India in London. In Digby's view, Bright's idea was 'practicable and necessary', and he even predicted it would result in competition for good works between the presidencies.¹⁰

With the help of a Liberal friend, Richard Tangye, Digby managed to get 10,000 copies of *Indian Problems for English Consideration* printed and circulated. The Liberal Federation's annual

meeting in October 1881 recommended extensive circulation for Digby's pamphlet among Liberal Associations, and stated that the Federation could be of great service in the cause of Indian reform along the lines Digby indicated. Digby was appointed a member of the General Committee of the Federation 'with a view to his re-opening the subject at a convenient time'.¹¹

However, after the occupation of Egypt in 1882, the Liberal Party became less supportive of its critics of empire. Once again, India was to pay for the British expedition, and this caused a conflict between the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, and the home government. The Secretary of State for India and Gladstone argued that the Suez Canal was much more important to India than to England; thus, the charges had to be met by the Indian government. Ripon strongly disagreed, but succeeded only in having the sum reduced.¹²

'India for the Indians – and for England'

Digby greatly admired Lord Ripon, who, as Viceroy of India from 1880 to 1884, re-established the freedom of the press after Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act of 1878, furthered education, and extended local self-government. During the 'Ilbert Bill' controversy in 1883–84, which resulted from Ripon's attempt to extend the right of qualified Indian magistrates to try Europeans in criminal cases, a short-lived British India Committee worked assiduously in support of Ripon, and Digby was actively involved in this work.¹³ After Ripon's arrival in Britain, Digby organised a dinner in his honour on 25 February 1885, in his capacity as the secretary of the National Liberal Club.

Digby was furious about the criticism of Lord Ripon and responded to it with a book, *India for the Indians – and for England*, published in February 1885.

In the preceding December he had written optimistically to Herbert Gladstone:

In that work I produce (almost entirely from official documents) evidence of the most remarkable character, evidence which if true (as I believe it to be to the very smallest sentence) ought to lead to a re-consideration of our position in India;

but nonetheless stressing that,

My suggestions (I believe) are in no degree wild. I recognise all the good England has done in India and is doing at the same time that I show the marked superiority of native rule under English over-lordship. The title of my little book, viz. *India for the Indians* – and for England, shows I am no revolutionist in my ideas.¹⁴

In the book, Digby reproached the Anglo-Indians' 'ecstatic admiration of themselves and their doings' which led British statesmen to adopt the same attitude of admiration towards them and to underestimate the Indian character and capabilities. Thus, Digby produced a powerful testimony in favour of Indians and their administrative capability.¹⁵ In his opinion, British rule in India ought to have adopted a merely supervisory role, so 'that the British, as they alone can in India, should keep the peace. That done they should stand aside, allowing the people to rule themselves according to their own ideas and experience of what is best.'¹⁶

He also repeated his economic statements from 1881, arguing that the British legal and scientific approach was too rigid, and that India required adaptability and sympathy. Native-governed villages were financially secure, due to flexible administration, whereas in British India the collection of land revenue was harsh even when crops failed;

in addition, in British provinces traditional village and communal life had been largely destroyed. He even argued that famines were more frequent in British provinces than in Indian states, due to severe failures in administration.¹⁷

'I never wrote a book or an article for a newspaper into which I put so much of myself as I have put into this book', Digby wrote to Herbert Gladstone at the time of publication.¹⁸ Gladstone, however, as Digby himself put it, was not willing to 'go into the merits of the case' and opposed Digby's actions. The main problem from Herbert Gladstone's point of view was, as Digby put it,

... the propriety, or otherwise, of the secretary of the National Liberal Club, in his private capacity and from his private address, calling attention ... to a state of things unparalleled by anything the government has had to deal with in either South Africa or North Africa – at home or abroad. You declare, inferentially rather than directly, my conduct to be incompatible with the position I hold.¹⁹

Hence, Digby was to give up his criticism of the Raj or resign his connection with the Club. His answer was:

Should an occasion again arise in which I shall be situated as I was situated when I wrote and issued the letter you condemn, I shall act as I acted then. With this difference, however, a difference caused by your letter to me: I shall inform the Committee what I am about to do and if they consider my conduct to be incompatible with the official position which I feel it an honour to hold, then as a man of honour and conscience I shall have no course before me but to resign the secretaryship. ... God forgive me for having, in the past, been too indifferent

to considerations such as I have described, and may He help me to be more true to the cause of ill-governed India in the future.²⁰

The election of 1885: 'India's Interest in the British Ballot Box'

The matter was left at that and Digby was made a Liberal parliamentary candidate for the forthcoming election. When he was 'no longer in hostility towards the wishes of the Committee', he approached Herbert Gladstone to get some 'pecuniary help' towards his expenses from the Liberal Central Association.²¹ Previously he had approached his Indian friends in a similar way, asking them to guarantee, in case of election, his election expenses, all office expenses, and an honorarium of £1,000 per year.²² The requests were as unsuccessful as his attempt to get into the Commons.

In British politics Digby was an advanced radical and a staunch supporter of Gladstone. He was determined to make Indian reforms part of the Liberal programme, but ended up disappointed. Indian nationalists were not eager to interfere in British party politics, believing that reform would be best accomplished by appealing to both Liberals and Conservatives alike. In 1885, even Dada-bhai Naoroji, who was later to become both Digby's close friend and a Liberal MP, held this opinion.²³ Furthermore, neither Digby nor anyone else managed to get William Gladstone – who was wholly preoccupied with the Irish question – significantly interested in India.

Before the election, Digby's book was briefly reviewed in *The Times*. The reviewer averred that it contained many points which were 'worthy of serious consideration'.²⁴ Soon afterwards, Digby published yet another book, *India's Interest in the British Ballot Box*. 20,000 copies – a

'In that work I produce evidence of the most remarkable character, evidence which ought to lead to a re-consideration of our position in India.'



quarter of which went to members of the National Liberal Club – were printed and all circulated by the end of September.²⁵

‘I do not know of a more complete task of the kind ever having been attempted or carried out’, Digby wrote to Lord Ripon, who paid the expenses. ‘From the purely business point of view only there is more than value for the money. I have never before known so much work done for so small an amount’, he assured Ripon when sending the bill. The readers of the book had ‘the opportunity of seeing what your lordship’s policy in India really was’; and furthermore, ‘in case of future depreciation of your work, the facts received will be useful, and will be availed of, for reference’. ‘There has not yet been time for people to read the pamphlet, but such remarks as I have heard from those who have read portions are full of admiration at what they regard as the moral grandeur and material beneficence of your administration,’ Digby asserted; ‘your lordship will see how your policy is accepted as the guiding star for the reformation of India’.²⁶

Dadabhai Naoroji, Liberal MP for Finsbury Central, 1892–95, the first non-white to sit in the House of Commons

Indeed, the book was to a great extent a major apologia for Ripon’s Indian policy. After discussing Ripon’s Viceroyalty in detail, Digby further emphasised the vital need for local self-government which Ripon had sought to advance. He also criticised the fact that the promises made to employ Indians in the government of their own country had not been kept. The first step forward, Digby argued, would be a ‘Royal Commission of Enquiry into the whole administration of India’.²⁷

Digby was convinced that the Indian issue could be warmly and successfully espoused by supporters of Liberal politics. He wrote confidently in the preface:

I remember how keenly my countrymen resisted the stamping out of Polish nationality by the despotic empires of Europe and how warmly they sympathised with the aspirations and the efforts of the Italians to free themselves from the hateful yoke of the Austrians at Venice and of the French at Rome. Consequently, I am sure that the affairs of their fellow-subjects in India and in the Crown Colonies will not be pushed aside as of little concern. ... The system of administration now existing in India is as certainly doomed to early overthrow as was Negro slavery in the United States.²⁸

In contrast to Indian nationalists, Digby stressed that Indian reform had to be made a party question: ‘None but Liberals are prepared for the annoyance, vexation, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, which always accompany the initiation of reform – whether for one’s own country or for another’, he explained, predicting that sooner or later ‘special broadly-defined Indian reforms will take a regular place in the programmes discussed on Liberal platforms’.²⁹

The election of 1885 was the first to bring the Indian issue to

the fore. In addition to Digby’s efforts, this was accomplished through the candidacy of Lal-mohan Ghose in east London and the visit of a three-man delegation from India. In the end, both Ghose and Digby were defeated.³⁰

The Indian Political Agency

At the end of 1885, the Indian National Congress formulated its programme and from then on Digby was a staunch advocate of its demands: the ‘Indianisation’ of the Indian civil service, considerable reductions in military expenditure, a parliamentary inquiry into Indian affairs, abolition of the India Council, and Indian representation in the legislative councils of India.

It was at this time that Digby befriended the leading Congressman, Dadabhai Naoroji, who settled in London in 1886, hoping to become a Liberal parliamentary candidate. When Naoroji first visited Digby in April 1886, he found the latter ‘depressed’ because ‘he had not suitable and proper representatives of India’. Then ‘he over and over again repeated that now that I had come, be the result about my object what it may, he will be able to work for India, with more heart and zeal. He was extremely desirous to do all that lay in his power to promote my object.’ When they met again ten days later, the work was well under way. To begin with, Digby strongly recommended that Naoroji change his Parsi headdress to an English top hat: ‘better to appear altogether like an Englishman’. He also intended to get Naoroji a ticket to a Liberal meeting in favour of the Irish Bill, and advised him to prepare to speak in favour of Irish Home Rule at some point.³¹

Disappointed by the non-political, leisurely social atmosphere at the National Liberal Club, Digby resigned his secretaryship in 1887. The following

April he formed an Indian and Political General Agency, which was to provide services for Indian political associations, native states, and individuals alike.³² Digby's main intention was to serve the Indian National Congress, and he thus suggested that all Indian political associations should jointly appoint him as their agent on a yearly fee of £250 plus expenses.³³

Naoroji's friend W. C. Bonnerjee, who was visiting London, personally guaranteed Digby's expenses for 1888.³⁴ The campaign got off to a highly promising start, and in the winter of 1888–89 Digby visited India to attend the fourth Congress and to secure financial support for his Agency. There he collaborated closely with A. O. Hume, who pressed upon Congress-workers the vital need for British propaganda on an adequate scale:

Our only hope lies in awakening the British public to a sense of the wrongs of our people – to a consciousness of the unwisdom and injustice of the present administration. The least we could do would be to provide ample funds ... to carry on agitation there, on the lines and scale of that in virtue of which the Anti-Corn Law League triumphed.³⁵

During his visit Digby became the English representative for several Indian papers, and London correspondent of the *Hindu* in Madras and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Calcutta, both eminent daily newspapers.³⁶ The financial question, however, remained unsolved.

In his Agency work, Digby received extensive help from the Liberal MP Charles Bradlaugh. Having a parliamentary representative 'of its own' was one of the most important things for the Agency. Prior to the founding of the Agency, Digby had asked Herbert Gladstone 'to do something to safeguard the interests of the Indian people who are, in all

such instances, entirely unrepresented and without a voice or direct influence',³⁷ but soon after the Agency was founded, Bradlaugh was 'chosen' instead.³⁸ From 1888 until Bradlaugh's death in 1891, Digby coached him on numerous Indian issues for questions in the Commons and energetically assisted him in promoting two successive Indian Reform Bills. A few samples of Bradlaugh's frequent messages to Digby serve best to reveal the nature of their relationship:

Have you a spare copy of the Memorandum which you prepared officially and circulated last year when it was thought my motion would come on for Royal Commission? Give me the exact references to the Lansdowne and Trevelyan referred to in it. You promised me a complete copy of the Dufferin Minute. If you have it kindly send it as early as you can together with a complete copy of the Lansdowne Minute of February. (16 June 1890).

Mr Asquith wants you to give him particulars so that he may speak for us on the Indian Councils Bill. I wish you would do it as early as you can, for we may be surprised any day by having the Bill thrust on us. Our duty is clearly to be ready for the fight always. (28 June 1890).

Reid wants you to pen him a short brief from which he could speak in support of my amendment. (1 July 1890).

When Bradlaugh's 'membership for India' became more famous, dozens of letters poured in from India to him, and he forwarded them regularly to Digby to answer on his behalf.³⁹

In order to gain financial support from India, Digby produced two considerable collections of articles and interviews which eloquently presented various sides of the British campaign

and, coincidentally, brought the crucial roles of Digby and, especially, Bradlaugh forward.⁴⁰ The first collection, *India in England*, also included Digby's interview with William Gladstone on Indian matters.

'I have always had good will towards the Indian people and have done for them, from time to time, all that has seemed to me possible', was the 'assurance of sympathy' from the Grand Old Man when interviewed by Digby in April 1889. Digby sought to convince Gladstone that 'if ever there was any organisation in the British Empire which deserved the hearty support of all English Liberals, it is this of the Congress', emphasising the constitutional manner in which the Congress acted. 'Indeed, I am speaking sober truth when I say there is no loyalty in the British dominions more sincere than that of the Indian reformers', Digby insisted. However, Gladstone was rather suspicious of the 'seditious native press' which, he had heard, contained 'writings of a disloyal character'. Digby assured Gladstone that he, who was an expert on the Indian press, did not know of any such instances; 'but as a matter of fact district officials in India are such irresponsible despots that they resent all comment on their actions however mild, and call that sedition what probably any unprejudiced person would say fair criticism'. Gladstone 'could well believe that'.⁴¹

In July 1889, Digby's Agency was merged with the newly-established British Committee of the Indian National Congress, and Digby was made its first secretary. When the Committee began publishing its own paper, *India*, in 1890, Digby also became its first editor. Funded mainly by Indian nationalists, *India* was distributed free to parliamentarians, political clubs and the British press, and in these important spheres it was fairly successful. However, money was an issue. Whereas the Anti-Corn

Digby coached Bradlaugh on numerous Indian issues for questions in the Commons and energetically assisted him in promoting two successive Indian Reform Bills.

Law League, Hume's model, had spent more than £200,000 in 1843–46, the Committee's yearly income averaged around £3,000.⁴² Indian financial support for the British Committee remained limited.

Radicalisation and defeat

Encouraged by Lord Ripon, Digby organised another British tour for a Congress delegation in the spring of 1890. The deputation of eight notable nationalists arrived in early April and began with public meetings in London, which Naoroji and Digby also attended.⁴³ At Bradlaugh's request, the nationwide tour was then started from his constituency, Northampton, where the meeting was held with 'very good attendance'.⁴⁴

Undoubtedly Digby also aimed to further his own cause within the Liberal Party through the delegates. They were summoned to a meeting at the National Liberal Club in order to 'acquaint them with the programme of the campaigners in Britain and to see in what way they could help'. He also emphasised to the readers of *Hindu* that 'everywhere Liberals have assisted the delegates and formed the audiences: nowhere have the Conservatives even attended the meetings to learn what Indian grievances are'.⁴⁵ Moreover, Digby organised the tour so that it finished conveniently with a meeting with William Gladstone. When the delegates affirmed their hopes for the first steps in representative government in India by the expansion and reconstitution of the councils, Gladstone responded: 'Well, it seems you must be prepared to wait a little longer for the realisation of your hopes. You will have to wait a while.'⁴⁶

At around the same time, Digby began to radicalise, which soon led him into disagreements with the Committee, which stressed moderation. The first sign of trouble appeared

with the last issue of *India* of 1890. This 'Christmas number', called 'The Kashmir Injustice: A British Disgrace', was, in effect, an exhaustive defence of the deposed Maharaja of Kashmir.⁴⁷ Digby had continued the commercial practice of his private Agency alongside his work for the Committee, and his dual roles as secretary to the Committee and, simultaneously, as head of his private Agency, were anomalous and confusing. His paid agitation on behalf of the Maharaja of Kashmir as well as those of Nepal and Mysore 'became increasingly a source of embarrassment to the Congress in India and its Committee in England'. Furthermore, Digby irritated the Indian government through his interference with the government's sensitive relations with the princely states.⁴⁸

Matters became even worse when Digby unleashed his anti-imperialism in the following issue, called 'An Open Letter to the Members of the House of Commons on The Dark Side of British Rule in India: a side so dark as to make it doubtful if British rule has been and is a blessing to the masses of India'. He cited an impressive array of statistics, exposing the huge dimensions of India's poverty, and blaming Britain.⁴⁹ This 'statistical revelation' continued in subsequent numbers, and Digby also repeated his strong arguments in an interview in *Greater Britain*, whose editor described Digby's letter as 'one of the most terrible indictments ever probably written of a governing race'.⁵⁰ At the same time, Digby's position in the Committee was weakened by the death of his patron, Charles Bradlaugh, in early 1891.

Nevertheless, Digby's energetic efforts carried him ahead in radical Liberal ranks, securing him a candidacy for South Islington in 1892. His election programme was similar to the official Gladstonian programme apart from the inclusion of the

issue of Indian reform, which stated the Congress demands.⁵¹

In 1891–92 Digby also acted as election agent for Naoroji, Liberal candidate for Central Finsbury. During the long election campaign which culminated in Naoroji's winning the seat, Digby was his staunchest supporter, taking care of many practical things and guiding Naoroji in Liberal circles and political practices.

In 1885 in North Paddington, Digby had secured 1,797 votes (42.0 per cent) against his Conservative competitor's 2,482 votes (58.0 per cent). In 1892 in South Islington he achieved 2,873 votes (47.4 per cent) against his Conservative competitor's 3,194 votes (52.6 per cent).⁵² 'Deeply disappointed' but 'not overcome', he wrote to a friend: 'I believe, if elected, I could have done India and this country some service. I ought to have won. And, I should have won if I had been fighting an honest foe. The 300 votes by which I lost were, literally, taken from me by means which will ill bear investigation.'⁵³

Digby thanked his supporters and explained his defeat in *India*, the *Hindu*, and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. In his opinion he was beaten 'because, in the last four days of the fight, our opponents almost literally snatched many of those who had promised us their support, out of our hands'. Among other things he complained that his competitor had replaced all Digby's posters – 'Vote for Digby and for Real Unity and Home Rule for Ireland' – with his own.⁵⁴

The last issue of *India* which Digby edited appeared in September 1892. In January 1893, *India* began its new series with H. Morse Stephens, Lecturer in Indian history at Cambridge, as its editor. The Committee continued on moderate lines, while Digby sometimes criticised it rather severely in his letters to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the *Hindu*.⁵⁵

'I have always had good will towards the Indian people and have done for them, from time to time, all that has seemed to me possible', Gladstone assured Digby.

In the following decade, Digby and Naoroji joined forces several more times on Indian matters. As late as 1904, the year Digby died, they addressed the London India Society, an organisation of Indian students in Britain, together. Digby began by stressing the need for Indian self-government, and Naoroji followed in similar vein. In the more radical atmosphere of the early 1900s, their suggestion 'was at once and almost universally approved by the nationalist press in India'.⁵⁶ By this time, both Digby and Naoroji had fully developed their ideas in huge volumes, both published in 1901. In *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, Naoroji put the finishing touches on his 'drain theory' – namely that Britain was draining wealth out of India – and Digby's satirically entitled '*Prosperous*' *British India: A Revelation from Official Records* constituted a major indictment of the financial and economic impacts of the Raj.

Despite their best efforts, Digby and his co-agitators did not succeed in making Indian reform a major issue in British politics. The official British response to the campaign was wavering and suspicious, and tended to avoid defining the aims of Indian policy in clear terms. Since Indian nationalists expected prompt legal reforms, they soon became frustrated with the constitutional approach and this frustration doomed the reform effort to failure.

Nevertheless, with his work Digby did his best to keep Indian concerns in the British media, and the British people gradually became more familiar with Indian affairs. Previously, the British Raj had been a subject of interest only to experts and Anglo-Indian officials, but during the 1880s it became discussed among the wider public as well. Indeed, Digby succeeded in his most important objective – namely to *familiarise* the British with the Indian administration

and 'render it easily digestible'. The campaign did shape public opinion in Britain, but in the eyes of Indian nationalists this happened far too slowly.

Certainly, being a critic of empire in late-nineteenth-century Britain was far from easy. Dissenters and pioneers were often ridiculed, and William Digby was no exception; as a consequence, he suffered a severe mental breakdown in 1886, from which it took years to recover fully, and when he died in 1904 at the age of 55, it was said to be of 'nervous exhaustion'.

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- (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1977), p. 30.
- 34 *India*, No. 15 (5 December 1890), p. 296.
- 35 A. O. Hume to the Indian nationalists, 10 February 1889, quoted in Sir W. Wedderburn, *Allan Octavian Hume: Father of the Indian National Congress, 1829–1912* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1913]), p. 70. Hume was the son of Joseph Hume, an Anti-Corn Law League activist.
- 36 ‘Mr Digby’s “Record”’, in W. Digby, *The General Election of 1892, South Islington: I. Address of the Liberal Candidate, Wm Digby, C.I.E.*
- II. Mr. Digby’s ‘Record’* (London: A. Bonner, 1892), p. 35.
- 37 W. Digby to H. Gladstone, 23 February 1886, British Library, Viscount Gladstone Papers, Add. MS 46052, f. 34.
- 38 Digby’s notes of an interview with Lord Ripon, 10 November 1888,

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Hubert Beaumont MP. After pursuing candidatures in his native Northumberland southward, Beaumont finally fought and won Eastbourne in 1906 as a ‘Radical’ (not a Liberal). How many Liberals in the election fought under this label and did they work as a group afterwards? *Lord Beaumont of Whitley, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW; beaumontt@parliament.uk.*

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/projects/cobden). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

Cornish Methodism and Cornish political identity, 1918–1960s. Researching the relationship through oral history. *Kayleigh Milden, Institute of Cornish Studies, Hayne Corfe Centre, Sunningdale, Truro TR1 3ND; KMSMilden@aol.com.*

Liberal foreign policy in the 1930s. Focusing particularly on Liberal anti-appealers. *Michael Kelly, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN; mmjkelly@msn.com.*

The Liberal Party’s political communication, 1945–2002. PhD thesis. *Cynthia Messeleka-Boyer, 12 bis chemin Vaysse, 81150 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; cynthiandrea@aol.com.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16. *Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.*

The Liberal revival 1959–64. Focusing on both political and social factors. Any personal views, relevant information or original material from Liberal voters, councillors or activists of the time would be very gratefully received. *Holly Towell, 52a Cardigan Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3BJ; his3ht@leeds.ac.uk.*

The rise of the Liberals in Richmond (Surrey) 1964–2002. Interested in hearing from former councillors, activists, supporters, opponents, with memories and insights concerning one of the most successful local organisations. What factors helped the Liberal Party rise from having no councillors in 1964 to 49 out of 52 seats in 1986? Any literature or news cuttings from the period welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; 07771 785 795; ianhunter@kew2.com.*

Liberals and the local government of London 1919–39. *Chris Fox, 173 Worplesdon Road, Guildford GU2 6XD; christopher.fox7@virgin.net.*

Liberal politics in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight 1900–14. The study of electoral progress and subsequent disappointment. Research includes comparisons of localised political trends, issues and preferred interests as against national trends. Any information, specifically on Liberal candidates in the area in the two general elections of 1910, would be most welcome. Family papers especially appreciated. *Ian Ivatt, 84 High Street, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3JT; ianjivatt@tynonline.co.uk.*

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands from December 1916 to the 1923 general election. Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 2HU; neil.fisher81@ntlworld.com.*

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Clr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

Life of Wilfrid Roberts (1900–91). Roberts was Liberal MP for Cumberland North (now Penrith and the Border) from 1935 until 1950 and came from a wealthy and prominent local Liberal family; his father had been an MP. Roberts was a passionate internationalist, and was a powerful advocate for refugee children in the Spanish civil war. His parliamentary career is coterminous with the nadir of the Liberal Party. Roberts joined the Labour Party in 1956, becoming a local councillor in Carlisle and the party’s candidate for the Hexham constituency in the 1959 general election. I am currently in the process of collating information on the different strands of Roberts’ life and political career. Any assistance at all would be much appreciated. *John Reardon; jbreardon75@hotmail.com.*

Student radicalism at Warwick University. Particular the files affair in 1970. Interested in talking to anybody who has information about Liberal Students at Warwick in the period 1965–70 and their role in campus politics. *Ian Bradshaw, History Department, University of Warwick, CV4 7AL; I.Bradshaw@warwick.ac.uk*

Welsh Liberal Tradition – A History of the Liberal Party in Wales 1868–2003. Research spans thirteen decades of Liberal history in Wales but concentrates on the post-1966 formation of the Welsh Federal Party. Any memories and information concerning the post-1966 era or even before welcomed. The research is to be published in book form by Welsh Academic Press. *Dr Russell Deacon, Centre for Humanities, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff CF23 6XD; rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk.*

Aneurin Williams and Liberal internationalism and pacificism, 1900–22. A study of this radical and pacifist MP (Plymouth 1910; North West Durham/Consett 1914–22) who was actively involved in League of Nations Movement, Armenian nationalism, international co-operation, pro-Boer etc. Any information relating to him and location of any papers/correspondence welcome. *Barry Dackombe. 32 Ashburnham Road, Ampthill, Beds, MK45 2RH; dackombe@tesco.net.*

- British Library, Ripon Papers, Add. MS 43636, f. 149.
- 39 Letters and telegrams from C. Bradlaugh, December 1889 – January 1891, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, William Digby Collection, MSS Eur D767/7.
- 40 *India in England, Volume II: Being a collection of speeches delivered and articles written on the Indian National Congress, in England in 1889* (Lucknow: G. P. Varma & Bros, 1889); W. Digby, *Indian Politics in England: The Story of an Indian Reform Bill in Parliament Told Week by Week; with Other Matters of Interest to Indian Reformers* (Lucknow: Ganga Prasad Varma & Bros, 1890).
- 41 ‘Mr. William Digby’s interview with Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone’, 8 April 1889, in *India in England, Vol. II*, pp. 61, 66.
- 42 M. D. Morrow, ‘The British Committee of the Indian National Congress as an Issue in and an Influence upon Nationalist Politics, 1889–1901’, in K. Ballhatchet and D. Taylor (eds), *Changing South Asia: Politics and Government* (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1984), p. 58.
- 43 *India*, No. 4 (11 April 1890).
- 44 C. Bradlaugh to W. Digby, 8 February 1890, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, William Digby Collection, MSS Eur D767/7; *India*, No. 5 (25 April 1890), pp. 87–93.
- 45 W. Digby to the *Hindu*, 25 April 1890, in Digby, *Indian Politics in England*, pp. 133, 135.
- 46 *India*, No. 9 (21 June 1890), p. 175.
- 47 *India*, No. 15 (19 December 1890).
- 48 S. R. Mehrotra, *A History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. I, 1885–1918* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1995), p. 96; Morrow, ‘The Origins and Early Years of the British Committee’, pp. 37–41.
- 49 *India*, No. 16 (16 January, 1891).
- 50 ‘The Man of the Month: Mr. W. Digby, C.I.E.’, *Greater Britain*, No. 4 (February 1891), p. 310; and Digby’s detailed answers to the editor’s comments in W. Digby, ‘British Rule in India: Has it been, is it now, a good rule for the Indian people?’ *Greater Britain*, No. 5 (March 1891), pp. 340–44.
- 51 Digby, *The General Election of 1892*, pp. 11–17.
- 52 F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 38, 25.
- 53 W. Digby to Sir George Birdwood, 10 July 1892, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Sir George Birdwood Collection, MS Eur F216/49.
- 54 *The Hindu*, 27 July 1892 and *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 July 1892, quoted in *India*, No. 33 (26 August 1892), p. 216; *India*, No. 33 (26 August 1892), pp. 216–18.
- 55 Mehrotra, *A History of the Indian National Congress*, p. 96.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

LETTERS

The greatest Liberal?

So Liberal historians, seeking ‘the greatest Liberal’ (*Journal* 57), have rejected Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George who actually held office, and they have rejected Keynes and Beveridge who, while never in office, substantially influenced events.

They have chosen instead the theoretician John Stuart Mill who sat only briefly as a Liberal MP, and lost his seat in the very 1868 general election which set in office the first government to which the name ‘Liberal’ can be applied without any hesitation.

Is there a moral, perhaps an unfortunate one, here? Do Liberal historians actually prefer theorists to people who do things?

Roy Douglas

Lloyd George and Hitler

I was astonished to read in the report of the discussion at the History Group meeting on ‘The Greatest Liberal’ (*Journal* 57) that Lloyd George ‘was credited with being one of the first to warn of the dangers of Hitler’. I hope that no one believed it!

Speaking at Barmouth in September 1933, Lloyd George argued that, if Hitler were to be overthrown, Communism would come to Germany. In November 1934, in the Commons, he said: ‘Do not let us be in a hurry to condemn

Germany. We should be welcoming Germany as our friend’.

In 1936, he sought in the Commons to justify Hitler’s remilitarisation of the Rhineland; and, after meeting the Fuehrer later in the year, he declared that Hitler was ‘indeed a great man’, and wrote an article about him in the *Daily Express*, headed ‘The George Washington of Germany’, in which he said that: ‘The idea of a Germany intimidating Europe with a threat that its irresistible army might march across frontiers forms no part in the new vision’, and that ‘the Germans have definitely made up their minds never to quarrel with us again’. Explaining away the concentration camps, he declared *Mein Kampf* to be Germany’s Magna Charta; and even after the declaration of war, in November 1939, he had to be dissuaded from sending Hitler a letter of congratulation following the Fuehrer’s fortuitous escape from an assassination attempt!

All this is well known to most historians. It seems to me to disqualify Lloyd George from being regarded as ‘The greatest Liberal’ or indeed as a liberal of any sort. It is a pity that none of this is mentioned in Kenneth Morgan’s account,

Vernon Bogdanor (*Professor of Government, Oxford University*)