

CHAMPION OF ELIOT CRAWSHAY

At Phillips's saleroom, London on 26 June 1986 the National Library of Wales was fortunate to have the opportunity to purchase the varied and interesting archives of two now largely forgotten Liberal MPs, a father and son – Arthur John Williams (1830–1911) and Eliot Crawshay-Williams (1879–1962).¹

Dr J. Graham

Jones discusses the political career of Eliot Crawshay-Williams (1879–1962), the left-wing Liberal MP for Leicester, 1910–13, who held posts under Churchill and Lloyd George



THE LIBERALISM: CRAWSHAY-WILLIAMS

ARTHUR JOHN Williams, Liberal MP for the Glamorganshire South constituency from 1885 until his defeat in 1895, a prominent member of the Liberation Society and a worthy patron of numerous Welsh causes, is now a largely forgotten figure, remembered simply as one of the principal founders of the National Liberal Club in 1881.² He was also a prominent barrister. He married in 1877 Rose Harriette Thompson Crawshay, the elder daughter of Robert Thompson Crawshay of Cyfarthfa Castle near Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales (the youngest son but principal heir to William Crawshay II, the so-called 'Iron King'). Crawshay's extreme displeasure at the marriage of his adored daughter to a politician is evident from a codicil to his will which ensured that no child born of the marriage would benefit from the Crawshay fortune.

One of the two sons of the marriage was Eliot Crawshay-Williams, born on 4 September 1879.³ Eliot was educated at Eton College and Trinity College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1900. While a student, he was already taking a keen interest in

political matters, especially in the affairs of the Liberal Party.⁴ He was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery where he remained for some three years, one in England and two in India. In the Grand Durbar of 1903 he was awarded the highly coveted medal for special service. Having resolved to return home in the hope of taking up a political career, Crawshay-Williams returned to Britain by an overland route, travelling via Persia and Russia. Just before he began this journey home, he was accorded the privilege of accompanying Lord Curzon in the Viceroy's expedition up the Persian Gulf. On his return to England, he published a volume entitled *Across Persia*, based on his experience of an eight-month trek across the deserts of Iran, a tome which was generally highly praised in the press reviews.

On his return home in June 1904, he interested himself in domestic political life with vigour, becoming well known to the leaders of the Liberal Party within a short time. He was soon viewed as a zealous and aspiring politician of considerable perspicacity and, supported by his father, he was strongly encouraged to stand as a parliamentary

candidate. His father wrote to him at the beginning of July:

You had better let Herbert Gladstone [the Liberal Chief Whip] know that if a fairly hopeful opening offers, you are disposed to stand. But as I have already told you I think you should clearly explain your position. They must not suppose that you have anything but a very modest allowance or that we are rolling in riches. If you stand we shall have to make a serious sacrifice in order to find the money and can only look upon it as an investment of capital. Whether it will ever yield any return I am afraid is doubtful.⁵

Within days, clearly following a meeting with Crawshay-Williams, Gladstone himself wrote to the aspiring politician, urging him to seek the Liberal nomination for the Chorley division of Lancashire:

I am of the opinion that the Chorley Division is the most favourable constituency now open for your start in political life. The Lancashire people are very straight-forward and earnest and they take a real interest in politics. On what you said to

Eliot Crawshay-Williams in 1934

me, I think we could settle the financial side of the matter.⁶

Crawshay-Williams himself recalled in his autobiography, published in 1935:

On August 13th, feeling partly like a mountebank, and partly like a very small lamb among a horde of ravening wolves, I stood before the Chorley Division Liberal Council to testify to my political faith. I was not yet twenty-five, and had had merely the so-called education of a gentleman, plus a few years of soldiering and travel. My enthusiasm for Liberalism was great, my energy and determination were abundant, but my knowledge of political detail was practically nil. I had, moreover, scarcely opened my lips in public. All this, however, had already been discounted by the authorities, for this was a practically hopeless seat.⁷

The primary consideration seemed to be the raising of his election expenses. Having discussed the matter with his father, Crawshay-Williams told the Chorley Liberals that he was in a position to provide £500 towards his expenses, plus a further £50 per annum towards nursing the constituency until the next general election. It was estimated, however, that the election expenses could well exceed £1,000. The candidate was warned by his concerned father, 'We can only spend £500 on the Election and this you have, I understand, already explained. I don't know what previous elections have cost, but Mr Lawrence can tell you what his were, and I am sure they were considerably more than £500'.⁸

Crawshay-Williams's candidature at Chorley clearly gave rise to considerable enthusiasm within the ranks of the Liberal Party – although it was realised on all sides that the division was a fairly safe Conservative seat where Lord

Balcarres, the Conservative candidate, had enjoyed a majority of 1,428 votes at the recent by-election in November 1903. Not the least of Crawshay-Williams's supporters was Winston Churchill, originally elected the Unionist MP for Oldham in 1900, but who had in May 1904 crossed the floor of the House of Commons to sit on the Liberal benches. He wrote enthusiastically to the new candidate in September 1904:

I am v[er]y glad to hear that you are going to stand & I most heartily wish you all success. You are fighting a most-narrow minded & reactionary fellow & a v[er]y ill-mannered one. As for my coming to speak for you I cannot promise definitely at present. But during October I shall be a good deal in Manchester & if you could meet me there we might have a talk & I could try to fix a date.

Churchill subsequently urged the young Liberal candidate to hold his public meetings under the auspices of the Free Trade League:

I recommend you to hold your meeting under the Free Trade League. There is no reason why the local Liberal Association should not cooperate. But a non-party body is in every way more effective. You will get supporters otherwise beyond your reach. If you manage your campaign well you ought to poll every Liberal vote. But that will not win the Chorley division. You must gain adherents from the Tory & non-party elements. The Free Trade League will be a powerful missionary.⁹

In his autobiography Crawshay-Williams vividly recalled that 'of all my new political friends, [Churchill] showed me the most kindness ... What Winston ever saw in me I do not know'.¹⁰ Churchill addressed a huge

political demonstration at Chorley on 7 December 1904, and invited Crawshay-Williams to speak at a meeting at Manchester North-West.¹¹

Throughout the year 1905 there was a great deal of speculation about the precise timing of the next general election, the arrangements for campaign meetings and the raising of the necessary election expenses. By March Crawshay-Williams had suffered a minor breakdown in his health and he was constantly subject to considerable pressure, evoking the sympathy of rising Liberal star David Lloyd George.¹² He had evidently recovered by the summer, and his candidature continued to attract public attention. Thomas Burt, the working-class Liberal MP for the Morpeth division and prominent within the Trades Union Congress, hailed Eliot as 'a worthy son of a worthy sire' who was evidently 'going on so well', while former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, much regretting his inability to address political meetings on behalf of Crawshay-Williams, commented, 'I only wish that Eton was less of a training school for Tories; and so I rejoice to see an Etonian Liberal like yourself'. The same month Churchill wrote to him, 'The Government seem to drag on from month to month in an extraordinary way, but after all the issue cannot now be long delayed, and I am quite sure we have profited by the delay'.¹³

Eventually, in the general election of January 1906, as widely predicted, Lord Balcarres defeated Eliot Crawshay-Williams by the comfortable margin of 1,387 votes. It was felt within the Liberal Party, however, that his total poll of 5,416 votes (44.3 per cent of those cast), the highest ever Liberal poll in the division and an increase of 618 votes over the Liberal total in the 1903 by-election, was highly creditable and reflected well on the novice candidate, auguring well

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for the success of his future political career. It was widely felt that a ministerial career lay ahead. Churchill was sympathetic and supportive:

I am indeed sorry you were not successful. You made a v[er]y plucky fight, & the large reduction in the Protectionist majority is a substantial proof of your hard work & effective argument. I hope another chance will open to you before long. In so large a majority vacancies must be numerous: & if I can be of any service to you, or you think so, you should write quite freely.¹⁴

A substantial total of more than £1,291 had been spent in the Liberal interest during the election campaign at Chorley, only about £220 of which had been raised by the divisional Liberal Association.¹⁵

Less than a month later Churchill, recently appointed the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in Campbell-Bannerman's new government, chose Crawshay-Williams to be his assistant private secretary:

The Treasury have consented to allow me one extra private secretary at a salary of £150 a year; but this will only be paid during the Parliamentary session – i.e. about six months in each year. I fear that the remuneration is scarcely more than nominal; but of course the fact that a government salary is paid makes the post an official one. If you care to undertake the work, which may sometimes be hard, and wh[ic]h will not always be dull, you will place me under a deep obligation to yourself. It would give me great pleasure to have your assistance, & I feel certain that your help will be most valuable to me. It occurs to me that as you are now living in London, & are anxious to keep in touch with the House of Commons & with political matters, the proposal

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wh[ic]h I venture to make may commend itself to you.¹⁶

It was a marvellous opportunity for the aspiring young politician. As Crawshay-Williams recalled in his memoirs:

I was invited to fill a small niche in the Government Establishment as Assistant Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. In spite of the slightly Mikado-like flavour of its title the job was one to be jumped at, and I jumped. I was even given a salary – £135 a year. My duties were not of statesmanlike magnitude, being mainly, as Winston put it, to keep the flies off him. But the opportunities of coming into close touch with the machinery and personnel of government, with the questions of the day, and, more important than all else, with a brilliant and commanding political personality, were precious and unique ... My prospect of the future was changed from a vista of aimlessness to an outlook of interesting and important activity. Whatever hand had twisted the kaleidoscope, I was deeply grateful for the touch, and on February 23rd 1906, I took up my new duties.¹⁷

The appointment indicated personal favour from Churchill and a degree of acceptance within the Liberal Party, now back in government after ten years in opposition.

In April Crawshay-Williams was invited to stand again as the Liberal candidate for Chorley at the next general election, but demurred because of the necessity of spending long periods in London. He enjoyed a generally amicable working relationship with Churchill and kept some contact with Campbell-Bannerman, the Prime Minister. When Churchill fell ill in May, Crawshay-Williams readily stepped in to undertake some of his duties at the Colonial

Office, where he felt thoroughly at home.

His career was followed with great interest in south Wales, where Crawshay-Williams delivered a number of absorbing lectures to local Liberal associations and local history societies. Amidst repeated conjecture that Sir George Newnes, the little-known Liberal MP for the Swansea District, was about to be raised to the peerage, Crawshay-Williams was approached as a possible Liberal candidate should a by-election occur, though in the event, no by-election took place. In a personal letter of introduction to Lord Grey, the Foreign Secretary, Churchill recommended Crawshay-Williams: 'He has ... had access to confidential papers and may be thoroughly trusted as a person of discretion'.¹⁸

During September 1906, together with Hamar Greenwood, the Liberal MP for the York division and also a private secretary to Winston Churchill, Crawshay-Williams toured the dominion of Canada. He was impressed by a country wholly new to him and the unfailing warmth of the reception accorded them from coast to coast: 'More and more I see how important it is to anyone who aspires to help in the affairs of the Empire to have a personal knowledge of men and matters in our dominions beyond the seas'. He met a number of Canadian politicians, among them William Lyon Mackenzie King, recently appointed the Deputy Minister of Labour and already considered an up-and-coming politician. Following their meeting, Mackenzie King wrote in his diary, 'At lunch I met Mr. Crawshay-Williams, Secretary to Winston Churchill, & spent the afternoon with him at the Experimental Farm. ... He seemed to me an active, wide awake fellow, quick to grasp points, a little aggressive perhaps, and fairly self-satisfied, tho' pleasant in manner &

companionable, a great talker'.¹⁹ (Mackenzie King entered the Canadian Federal Parliament as a Liberal in 1908, served as Minister of Labour and then as Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 until June 1926, September 1926 until 1930, and again from 1935 until 1948.)

On his return to Britain Crawshay-Williams gave a large number of talks and lectures on his Canadian experiences, urging his audiences to visit the dominion. He also spoke on the 1906 Education Bill and on the pressing need to reform the House of Lords. He published substantial articles on political subjects in newspapers and journals. His name was mentioned as a potential Liberal candidate in several constituencies, including the Grantham division of Lincolnshire, where a prominent local Liberal wrote:

I cannot see how a prospective candidate is going to get off for less than £200 a year. Mr. Priestley [the Liberal MP for Grantham since 1900] says he has spent £500 a year since he became the Member. The Tory candidates spend much more than this and I am afraid Grantham had got into the way of expecting it. Mr. Crawshay Williams would be an excellent candidate but unless he was in the position to spend money fairly liberally he will be of no use whatever to Grantham.²⁰

As the year 1907 ran its course, Crawshay-Williams's attention was taken up increasingly with the need to reform the Lords, to build harmonious relations between the Liberal and Labour parties and the necessity of introducing electoral reforms such as proportional representation or the alternative vote. He spoke on the impact of socialism and relations between the Liberal and Labour parties. He spared no effort, too, in attempting to secure an honour such as a knighthood for his

ageing father, A. J. Williams, who coveted such recognition almost obsessively. At the end of the year he was appointed a JP for the county of Glamorgan, where his father was Deputy Lieutenant.

He was also anxious to retain some association with military life, an interest reawakened by the publication, by Arnold in January 1908, of his well-received volume of reminiscences, *Across Persia*. The next month he was informed that 'Chorley Liberalism' was 'in the dumps' and that the local Liberal Party had felt compelled to give notice to their paid political agent in January.²¹

In April came the news that the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was resigning and had only a short time left to live. Crawshay-Williams was widely tipped as the ideal candidate for the ensuing by-election in the Stirling Burghs, a safe Liberal seat where Campbell-Bannerman had been returned unopposed in January 1906 – 'It was this comfortable and traditional stronghold of Liberalism which I was to inherit. If all went well.' On 9 April he received a telegram from the Master of Elibank, the Liberal Chief Whip, urging him to travel to Edinburgh for a snap meeting which went off exceedingly well, Elibank proclaiming, 'You've captured them, and I think It's as good as arranged'.²²

Campbell-Bannerman died on 22 April, but at the eleventh hour the Scottish Liberal Association, concerned at 'the premature disclosure' of Crawshay-Williams's name as the candidate, resolved that Arthur Ponsonby, the principal private secretary to the late Prime Minister and the defeated Liberal candidate at Taunton in 1906, should be the Liberal aspirant for the Stirling Burghs. There was anxiety to avoid an acrimonious contest for the nomination, and it was widely

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felt that Ponsonby's long and close association with CB gave him a distinct advantage over Crawshay-Williams.²³

Within days of the Stirling rejection, however, Crawshay-Williams's name was mentioned in connection with the Liberal vacancy in Pembrokeshire caused by the elevation of the sitting Liberal MP J. W. Philipps to the House of Lords as Lord St Davids. The new baron warned him, however, that: 'Pembrokeshire [was] a very tricky place for an outsider. I don't think for a moment a stranger would be selected, and if he was, he would, at the best, enormously reduce the majority and have a very unpleasant berth. It is an extraordinary clannish county.' He urged Crawshay-Williams to seek nomination in a more congenial constituency.²⁴ Again the prize eluded him, and W. F. Roch was chosen as the Liberal candidate. But Crawshay-Williams was clearly much attracted by the appeal of Welsh politics and delivered a number of political lectures and speeches in south Wales at this time.

Other changes were taking place in the wake of Campbell-Bannerman's resignation. Churchill was moved from the Colonial Office to succeed Lloyd George, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, as President of the Board of Trade. In May, Crawshay-Williams announced his resignation from his position at the Colonial Office 'in order to enter upon active political work'.²⁵ He continued his search for a Liberal nomination and became more and more involved in the ongoing debate on parliamentary reform and the need for a parliamentary inquiry on the subject. Advocacy of the alternative vote system also engaged him.

On 23 July 1908 Crawshay-Williams married Alice Gay-Roberts, originally of Turlake in Devon, the daughter of James Henry Gay-Roberts. The newlyweds travelled extensively as part

of an extended honeymoon, and did not return to England until 3 December. During the same month Crawshay-Williams was pressed by the Liberal executive of the Wirral division of Cheshire to consider standing as their prospective candidate. Feelers came, too, from many other areas. By the beginning of 1909 he himself had resolved that he wished to be nominated 'not for a County Division, but for a Borough, where such extended and assiduous attention is not necessary as when a large area has to be covered'.

In February 1909, Crawshay-Williams – hailed locally as 'a radical to the core' – was chosen as the Liberal candidate for Leicester, a two-member constituency, as successor to Franklin Thomasson, who had indicated his desire to stand down. His adoption coincided with the escalating suffragette agitation and the mounting campaign to secure universal manhood suffrage in Britain, a theme which the new candidate tackled in his early speeches during February and March. On 9 March he addressed the Leicester Liberal Thousand and was formally adopted as the prospective Liberal candidate. In subsequent political meetings, he indicated his support for the introduction of radical social legislation and remained true to his long-standing support for the 'Votes for Women' campaign, while carefully distancing himself from the more militant wing of the suffragette movement. He also published a monograph advocating the nationalisation of the railways. In June his daughter, Alice, was born, and Eliot returned to part-time military duties at Croxton Park, Leicestershire.²⁶

As Winston Churchill readily agreed to address a meeting at Leicester in support of the candidature of his old friend, the threat of suffragette disturbances were in the forefront of his mind:



Campaigning in Leicester, 1909; centre, Eliot and Alice Crawshay-Williams

I hope you will see that all proper precautions are taken, that no women are allowed in the meeting unless vouched for, that all such women, except those who are so well-known as to sit on the platform, should be placed in one part of the building, and not mixed up with the men; that a sufficiency of stewards should be provided to deal with any disorder; that the building be

thoroughly searched before the meeting, the roof as well as all cupboards and recesses being properly examined; and, lastly, that the space in front of the building should be kept clear by the police, so as to prevent disturbance and attempts to rush the doors; this last has been a feature of previous meetings, and the police ought to know that it is their duty not to allow a crowd close

to the door as otherwise a disorder will ensue: it is better to keep the streets clear for one hundred yards outside the door during the meeting.²⁷

It was indeed an exciting time in political life. The House of Lords was debating Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' and was widely expected to reject it; on 30 November they duly threw it out by 250 to 75. In October two Conservative candidates were adopted at Leicester, while a joint conference of the local Labour Party and trades unions associated with the Leicester Trades Council resolved to re-nominate as the Labour candidate James Ramsay MacDonald, the holder of the second seat there since 1906. There was no mention, however, of the nomination of a second Labour candidate, a move which much enhanced Crawshay-Williams's prospects of success at the polls in the double-member constituency.²⁸

As the general election grew closer, Crawshay-Williams again advocated the adoption of an alternative vote system of voting for county seats and a system of proportional representation for borough constituencies. He doggedly refused the offer of financial assistance from central party funds; in his memoirs he rejoiced that both he and Ramsay MacDonald 'conducted our campaigns with entire independence'. Indeed, they ran almost in double harness, 'working in amity, if not actually in co-operation'.²⁹ As the campaign gathered momentum, Churchill urged his old associate to 'try and poll as early as possible so as to influence the course of the conflict'. Asserting that the Budget League, a Liberal organisation formed to rally support for the contentious proposals embodied in Lloyd George's 'People's Budget', was 'alive and flourishing', he promised to ensure that more than a hundred large Budget League posters were

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put up on various key hoardings in Leicester and to convene a Budget League meeting in the city. With regard to financial support from the Liberal Party centrally, Churchill proffered the following advice:

I think you take too stiff a view of the matter, as I certainly do not consider that the acceptance of assistance from party funds involves any loss of honourable independence. It seems to me that the small pecuniary aid accorded bears no proportion to the great political duties discharged. At the same time I think that the view which you take is very respectable, & you know my maxim – 'Never force little dogs to eat mutton'.³⁰

Generally the contest was conducted amicably and vigorously by the three political parties. Close to the poll, however, postcards were distributed by his political opponents attributing unacceptable views to Crawshay-Williams on betting and gambling issues; he was accused of supporting them over-zealously and of being reluctant to support legislation which restricted them. During the campaign, he played tennis each morning to remain in peak physical condition and gave up drinking alcohol. As Liberal Party mandarins considered Leicester a safe seat, very little outside assistance was available, and the candidate was himself compelled to address two or three meetings each day, all of them reported in detail in the local press. The eve-of-poll meeting was held at the Leicester Temperance Hall and was followed by a torchlight procession. An exhausted Crawshay-Williams toured the city's polling stations on the day of the poll, 17 January 1910.³¹

In the general election of January 1910 Eliot Crawshay-Williams just headed the poll at Leicester with 14,643 votes. Ramsay MacDonald polled 14,337, and the two Conservative

candidates trailed far behind. Although the outcome had been widely anticipated, the new MP was still surprised at his election as the 'senior MP' for the city of Leicester – 'slightly bewildered, but intoxicatingly happy'. He was hailed locally as a candidate who had given support to the aspirations of the Labour Party and he certainly remained on friendly terms with MacDonald.³²

From the outset of his parliamentary career, Crawshay-Williams was viewed as very much an individualist, with his own views on the political issues of the day – yet it was also recognised that he was keen to assume ministerial office. On 16 February the new MP took his oath in the House of Commons and, within just eight days, had delivered his maiden speech, on the government resolutions to be embodied in the Veto Bill designed to limit the powers of the House of Lords – 'a creditable performance' in Churchill's words.³³ On 11 March he was asked by Lloyd George, still Chancellor of the Exchequer, to become his parliamentary private secretary and was, at the same time, requested to return to a similar position at the Colonial Office. Perplexed, he turned to Churchill for advice. 'Of course you must go to [Lloyd] George' was his unambiguous advice.³⁴ The new position was an auspicious step up the slippery political pole.

Crawshay-Williams took up his new position in the midst of speculation that another general election might be necessary because of the constitutional crisis precipitated by the House of Lords' rejection of the 'People's Budget' and the subsequent debates over the supremacy of the Commons over the Lords. In April he introduced to the Commons his Parliamentary Elections (Alternative Vote) Bill, based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, while a constitutional conference was set up

to discuss relations between the Lords and the Commons. In July he voted for the second reading of the Conciliation Bill on women's suffrage and still displayed general support for the suffragette cause. In the autumn he introduced a bill calling for the reversal of the Osborne judgement by the House of Lords in 1909, which had outlawed the automatic payment of a political levy to the Labour Party by trades unionists.

A second general election duly took place in December 1910. Crawshay-Williams was again returned at the top of the poll at Leicester, again just slightly ahead of Ramsay MacDonald, with the sole Conservative candidate, a new aspirant, trailing badly in third place. His 5,691 vote majority, although slightly down from 6,095 in January, meant that Leicester was one of the safest Liberal seats in the country. During the course of the election campaign he spoke widely on behalf of a number of other Liberal candidates, addressing twelve major political meetings outside his own constituency, and was clearly regarded as a valuable electoral asset for his party, with a potentially glittering political career ahead of him – seemingly assured still further by his close links with both Churchill and Lloyd George.³⁵ He personally contributed no less than £1,270 towards his election expenses.

Crawshay-Williams was prominent at Westminster as he witnessed the final passage of the Parliament Bill, removing the Lords' power of veto, in March 1911. During the same month, at a time when the introduction of the payment of MPs for the first time was being keenly debated in political circles as a result of mounting pressure from the fledgling Labour Party, the senior Member for Leicester introduced a bill limiting to £50 annually the total subscriptions to local clubs, societies and organisations which MPs might

pay within their own constituencies. At the end of April, he introduced the Adult Suffrage Bill (promoted by the People's Suffrage Federation) which proposed to give the franchise to everyone of both sexes over the age of 21 years. This latter measure also provided that the residential qualification should be reduced to three months, that plural voting be abolished, and that the electoral registers be revised and updated every three months. Crawshay-Williams was viewed as a champion of electoral and franchise reform and a keen advocate of progressive legislation. He also pressed for the closer involvement of the overseas dominions in the management of imperial affairs, while always underlining his military experience.³⁶ In September he suffered the loss of his father, Arthur J. Williams, who had always encouraged him to pursue a political career and had given him a great deal of advice and practical support.

Crawshay-Williams participated actively in the Free Trade Lecture scheme and supported the work of the Free Trade Union set up to oppose the retention and imposition of protective tariffs. He delivered five major speeches in the House of Commons during the year 1911 (compared with three during 1910). He found that, on average, he received, as a MP, about a dozen letters a day, although it was noticeable that his postbag increased significantly during the parliamentary session (compared with the recesses). At the time of the introduction of the 1911 Insurance Bill, he was staggered to receive about thirty letters each day, and a total number of some 3,744 letters came to hand during the course of a year.³⁷

As 1912 dawned, Crawshay-Williams remained preoccupied with the necessity to introduce the alternative vote system in parliamentary elections. On 29 April he introduced the

Parliamentary Elections (Alternative Vote) Bill, remaining true to his long-standing conviction that such a system had many advantages over 'the old and cumbrous second ballot'. In March he resolved to vote against the second reading of the Conciliation Bill on women's suffrage (the measure was designed to grant the franchise only to certain groups of women) as a personal protest against 'the most recent acts of violence ... If, as I hope and believe will be the case, other members take the same course as myself, the lesson to the Suffragettes will, I trust, be obvious and effective.' He clearly felt strongly on the matter: 'The wanton and disgraceful attacks on the property of unoffending persons during the last few days ... appear to me to make it urgently necessary to show their perpetrators and, what is more important, those who are misguided enough to furnish them with funds, that they are by their folly defeating the ends they profess to serve'.

In the same month he put down a parliamentary question to H. H. Asquith, the Prime Minister, on the possible institution of a Royal Commission to inquire into industrial unrest in Britain. He insisted on raising the question in the Commons despite repeated requests from Asquith, who considered it 'inopportune', to withdraw it. This question aroused much public and parliamentary interest, and by May the government (tartly dismissing a full Royal Commission as merely 'a shelving expedient') had resolved to appoint a cabinet committee to investigate the problem of industrial unrest. Crawshay-Williams devoted considerable time and effort to the drafting of a Minimum Wage Bill, and he also lent support to the campaign to disestablish and disendow the Welsh church.³⁸

In June he put down an amendment to Clause 9 of the Irish Home Rule Bill, proposing

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that the Irish House of Commons should be elected on an adult suffrage basis, advocating that the qualifying age for males should be 21 years and for females 25. There was to be a three months' residential qualification, and the institution of his pet idea, the transferable vote. His amendment aroused considerable public interest and support. He was convinced that the Irish Home Rule Bill should be pushed through Parliament as quickly as possible, and had become convinced that a system of strict proportional representation was not really suitable in the UK or Ireland on the grounds that it was likely to result in a succession of relatively weak, unstable coalition or national governments. He remained a popular constituency MP at Leicester, where there was some talk of running two Liberal candidates 'in harness' at the next general election, partly as a result of growing local Liberal dissatisfaction with Ramsay MacDonald. Asquith was invited to address a public meeting in the city during the autumn.³⁹

During 1913, however, Eliot Crawshay-Williams's promising political career came tumbling down. In March he was named as co-respondent in a divorce case brought by Hubert Carr-Gomm, Liberal MP for the Rotherhithe division of Southwark since 1906 and a close political associate. As Crawshay-Williams later wrote in his autobiography, 'I recognised at once that under the then-existing circumstances of public life this was almost certainly the death blow of my career'. He resigned his Leicester seat amongst sadness and regret in local Liberal circles at this abrupt termination of a representation which, it had been anticipated, would have continued for many years to come. He announced his complete withdrawal from active political life, while expressing a wish to continue public service in some capacity.

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In July Carr-Gomm was granted a decree nisi – made absolute the following February – on the grounds of his wife Kathleen's adultery with Crawshay-Williams.⁴⁰ 'What made the case a bad one', recorded Lucy Masterman, wife of the former Liberal cabinet minister C. F. G. Masterman, was not just that Crawshay-Williams was married with two children, a daughter and a son, but that he was Carr-Gomm's long-term 'most intimate friend at school, college and in politics'. Mrs Masterman also noted that both Lloyd George and Churchill had become involved in the matter, the former making abortive efforts to bring the estranged couple back together, and the latter having made an attempt 'to frighten Carr-Gomm out of bringing the case, a proceeding which naturally made him angry'.⁴¹

The case aroused considerable public interest and disapproval; neither Crawshay-Williams nor Kathleen Carr-Gomm made any attempt to deny their adultery when the case came to court. Both Churchill and Lloyd George were said to have attempted to persuade their ally not to resign his parliamentary seat, and they apparently leaned on Carr-Gomm to pay an allowance to his ex-wife. He eventually agreed to make her an allowance of £500 a year, but protracted wrangling then ensued over the precise details of the payments. According again to Lucy Masterman, Lloyd George regarded 'an irregular love affair as a very trifling matter – even in a married woman', in clear contradistinction to Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney-General, who looked upon this episode 'very grimly'. At lunch one day as the drama unfolded, Isaacs denounced Crawshay-Williams's seduction of Kathleen Carr-Gomm, his own friend's wife, as 'unpardonable, absolutely unpardonable behaviour'. In a rather sheepish manner,

Lloyd George looked down at his plate 'feeling vaguely that he was being scolded, and said in a very meek voice – "I suppose it *was* rather wrong!"'⁴² It is tempting to speculate whether the exposure of the truth about Lloyd George's own extramarital infidelities would have brought his own political career to an equally abrupt end; and it is amazing that awareness of the potential risks does not appear to have deterred him, a serial adulterer for years past.

Both Lloyd George and Churchill remained involved in the Carr-Gomm case well into 1914, and both remained in close contact with Crawshay-Williams, who still took an interest in the course of political life. In 1915 Alice Crawshay-Williams was granted a divorce on the grounds of her husband's statutory desertion and adultery, and her former husband married Kathleen Carr-Gomm later the same year. This second marriage was to last until 1924, again ending in acrimonious divorce proceedings.

After the outbreak of the First World War Crawshay-Williams commanded the 1st Leicestershire Royal Horse Artillery from 1915 until 1917, witnessing active military service in Egypt and Palestine. From 1918 until 1920 he was attached to the Headquarters of the Northern Command, based mainly in Egypt, during which period he published three volumes of poetry and a well-received account of his military experiences, *Leaves from an Officer's Notebook*. He also wrote intelligent, informed commentaries on political developments for newspapers and journals, and he remained in contact with both Lloyd George and Churchill, forwarding copies of his various publications to both men. In July 1917 he approached the latter, by then Minister for Munitions, seeking employment within the ministry, but without success.

As the war drew to a close, Crawshay-Williams seriously considered re-entering political life, but now through the Labour Party. He approached Arthur Henderson, the party's secretary:

I regret that, if I come back into politics, it will mean dissociation from many friends whom I respect; but, as I told you, I have been brought to believe that not only more far-reaching reforms, but a more live and vigorous spirit are needed today than can be hoped for from either of the parties who have hitherto governed this country. If, therefore, I am to take part in politics ... it will have to be either as an independent politician, or, if there be room for me under your new constitution, as a member of the Labour Party, with whose aims, even when I was an orthodox Liberal I was so far in agreement as sometimes to involve me in difficulties with my own supporters.⁴³

As the Liberal MP for Leicester before the First World War, Crawshay-Williams had certainly taken a left-wing, quasi-Socialist stand on many issues and had formed a close rapport with his fellow-MP Ramsay MacDonald.

Further legal proceedings at Leeds crown court in 1918–19, however, rendered impossible a political come-back, and a dejected Crawshay-Williams turned to pursuing his literary endeavours for the rest of his days. In the autumn of 1921 he produced a Grand Guignol play entitled *E. and O.E.*; further Grand Guignol plays (dramas that emphasised the horrifying or the macabre) appeared in 1924 and 1927.

But he found it impossible to escape from some involvement in politics, following excitedly the course of the November 1922 general election and speculating on how the use of an alternative

vote system would have benefited the Liberal Party, which was still split into two warring camps. He wrote to congratulate some Labour and advanced Liberal candidates on their re-election to parliament. He wrote at some length to his old ally and chief Winston Churchill who, against all the odds, had just been defeated at Dundee, which he had represented since 1908:

I was very sorry to see the news about Dundee – not sorry politically, but sorry on general grounds because you ought always to be in the full stream of politics. ... I often think with a rather pathetic pleasure of those days at the Colonial Office, and afterwards in the House, when we were more or less together, and with gratitude of all your kindness to me. Now I am busy on work which is more peaceful, if less important, than that I had hoped to do; but some times there still comes upon me the ache to be doing something in the old sphere of action. However, I set it resignedly by.⁴⁴

In the general election of October 1931, held in the wake of the formation of the National Government, although asserting his continued adherence to the Liberal Party and the cause of free trade, Crawshay-Williams lent support to Ramsay MacDonald 'in his fight for economy and financial stability' in order to 'avoid a disaster such as it is difficult for us in this country to conceive'. He felt in consequence that it was the patriotic duty of British electors 'to put aside party and vote first for those who are committed to maintain the national credit'. He offered to support the candidature of Sir Thomas Jones, the 'National candidate' (really a Conservative) in his south Wales home constituency of Ogmores, against the sitting Labour MP.⁴⁵ He even planned to speak at Jones's final eve-of-poll meeting

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at Bridgend. In the event Ted Williams, the Labour candidate, easily romped home at the top of the poll.

During the 1930s Crawshay-Williams remained in touch with Churchill, for whom he clearly felt much admiration, and also kept up other contacts in political circles. In February 1939 he sent the ageing Lloyd George a copy of his new novel, *Votes and Virgins*; he had already forwarded a proof copy of the text to Churchill the previous month, with a request for him to write a foreword to the book – predictably, the request was refused 'in the present pressure of events'. Following the fall of Paris in June 1940, when the outlook looked bleak for the Allied war effort, he wrote at some length to Churchill, then some six weeks into his premiership:

It does seem to me, and, I know, to others, that 'if and when' an informed view of the situation shows that we've really not got a practical chance of actual ultimate victory, no question of prestige should stand in the way of our using our nuisance value *while we have one* to get the best peace terms possible. Otherwise, after losing many lives and much money, we shall merely find ourselves in the position of France – or worse.

Churchill's reply was blunt: 'I am ashamed of you for writing such a letter. I return it to you – to burn & forget.'⁴⁶

In 1943 Crawshay-Williams lent support to the demand for the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales. But his main preoccupation by this time was as a writer, of poetry, prose fiction, film scripts and a memoir.⁴⁷ His political acumen and talents were never put to any further use, although he still continued to write articles on political matters, Welsh affairs, the Territorial Army, colonial developments and an array of

other subjects. Among his best-known novels in the 1930s were *A Night in the Hotel* and *Stay of Execution*. He was to devote his later years primarily to the writing of light fiction which generally sold well and earned him a fine reputation as a creative writer. His autobiography, *Simple Story*, published in 1935, was a moving document of considerable human interest.

He spent much of the Second World War at his Welsh home, Plas Coed-y-Mwstwr, near Bridgend in Glamorgan, and from 1941 until 1943 acted as the Chief Civil Defence Officer at the Great Trading Centre and Estate at Treforest, near Pontypridd. During the later stages of the war he lectured extensively to members of HM Forces, and immediately after the war he chaired the Coed-y-Mwstwr (Approved) School, a social and educational experiment of great interest. Having suffered from increasing blindness during his last years, Eliot Crawshay-Williams died on 11 May 1962 at the age of 82.

Crawshay-Williams was a talented and natural politician, the son of a Liberal MP, whose popularity was reflected in the large number of local Liberal associations which wished to secure him as their parliamentary candidate. He won the support of both Churchill and Lloyd George, and a good future, possibly even a ministerial position, clearly lay ahead of him within the Liberal Party – though given his distinct left-wing leanings, he would probably eventually have joined the Labour Party, like Haldane, Buxton and Ponsonby, among many others. Yet he sacrificed his career as a result of his unacceptable personal life. His experience readily invites comparison with that of Sir Charles Dilke whose promising political career was also effectively terminated in 1885 following a notorious and well-publicised divorce case.

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Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

- 1 See *NLW Annual Report, 1986–1987* (Aberystwyth, 1987), p. 64.
- 2 The only extensive account of A. J. Williams's political career is J. Graham Jones, 'Arthur J. Williams MP (1830–1911)', *Morgannwg*, Vol. XLIV (2000), 105–28.
- 3 There is a helpful overview of his career in his obituary in *The Times*, 12 May 1962, p. 10. There is also a useful potted biography of Eliot Crawshay-Williams in the column 'Political personalities', *The Planet*, 8 October 1910.
- 4 See National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B1/1, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to EC-W, 4 May 1899.
- 5 Ibid. B2/11, Arthur J. Williams to EC-W, 8 July 1904.
- 6 Ibid. B2/13, Herbert Gladstone to EC-W, 14 July 1904.
- 7 Eliot Crawshay-Williams, *Simple Story: an Accidental Autobiography* (London, 1935), p. 50. *The Times* had announced on 30 July the decision to recommend the adoption of Crawshay-Williams at Chorley.
- 8 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B2/18, A. J. Williams to EC-W, 9 August 1904.
- 9 Ibid. B14/3, Churchill to EC-W, 12 September 1904 (copy); B14/6, Churchill to EC-W, 6 October 1904 (copy); B14/7, Churchill to EC-W, 9 October 1904 ('Private') (copy).
- 10 *Simple Story*, p. 52.
- 11 See T. W. Killick to Churchill, 4 October 1904, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol II, Companion, Part 1, 1901–1907* (London, 1969), p. 363.
- 12 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B3/9, D. Lloyd George to EC-W, 16 March 1905. See also the interesting letters from Arthur J. Williams to his son in file B3.
- 13 Ibid. B3/26, Thomas Burt to EC-W, 6 September 1905; B3/27, Lord Rosebery to EC-W, 10 September 1905 ('Private'); B14/4, Churchill to EC-W, 2 September 1905 (copy).
- 14 Ibid. B14/19, Churchill to EC-W, 25 January 1906 ('Private') (copy).
- 15 Ibid. B4/11, Arthur W. Adkins, election agent, to EC-W, 5 February 1906.
- 16 Ibid. B14/20, Churchill to EC-W, 18 February 1906 ('Private') (copy).
- 17 *Simple Story*, p. 60. The appointment is noted in *The Times*, 26 February 1906.
- 18 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/23, Churchill to Lord Grey, 23 August 1906 (copy), endorsed by EC-W, 'Copy of W. S. Churchill's introduction for me to Lord Grey'.
- 19 *Chorley Standard*, 22 September, 13 October and 1 and 15 December 1906; *Lancashire Daily Post*, 6 December 1906; *Manchester Dispatch*, 11 December 1906; National Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, diary material, p. 255, diary entry for 12 September 1906. (I owe this last reference to the kindness of Dr Richard Toye, Cambridge.)
- 20 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B5/43, letter from J. Handley Parker of Grantham to Jesse Herbert, 16 March 1907.
- 21 Ibid. B6/5, Arthur W. Adkins, election agent, to EC-W, 5 February 1908.
- 22 *Dundee Advertiser*, 17 April 1908; *Glasgow Evening Times*, 17 April 1908; *Simple Story*, pp. 73–74.
- 23 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B6/24, Alexander Murray, the Master of Elibank, Scottish Liberal Association, to EC-W, 29 April 1908 ('Private'); ibid. B6/27, Arthur Ponsonby to EC-W, 1 May 1908.
- 24 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B6/39, J. W. Philipps to EC-W, 7 May 1908; *Western Mail*, 11 May 1908; *South Wales Daily News*, 11 May 1908.
- 25 *The Times*, 20 May 1908.
- 26 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B7/4, EC-W to F. H. Jones, 13 January 1908 (copy) in relation to an approach from the Stamford division; *Simple Story*, pp. 84–88; *Leicester Daily Post*, 17 February 1909; numerous press cuttings in NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, vol. J5, pp. 1–34.
- 27 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/40, Churchill to EC-W, 24 August 1909 (copy). See J. Graham Jones, 'Crawshay-Williams,

- Churchill and the Suffragettes: a note', *National Library of Wales Journal*, Vol. XXX, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 447–54.
- 28 *Leicester Daily Post*, 22 October 1909.
- 29 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B7/93, EC-W to Churchill, 2 December 1909 (copy); *Simple Story*, pp. 95–96; see also the friendly tone of the communication from Ramsay MacDonald to EC-W, 27 December 1909, in NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/52 (copy).
- 30 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/50, 52 and 54, Churchill to EC-W, 13 and 22 December 1909 and undated [?December 1909] (copies).
- 31 *Simple Story*, pp. 95–96.
- 32 *Ibid.*; *Leicester Daily Post*, 18 January 1910.
- 33 See Churchill to King Edward VII, 24 February 1910, cited in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol II, Companion, Part 2, 1907–1911* (London, 1969), p. 976. Churchill here described EC-W to the King as 'a young man who was formerly an artillery officer'.
- 34 *Simple Story*, p. 103.
- 35 See the highly complimentary portrait of EC-W in *The Young Liberal*, December 1910, p. 14.
- 36 *The Times*, 30 March and 28 April 1911.
- 37 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B18/4, note on 'number of letters received and answered', [c. 1911].
- 38 *The Times*, 29 April 1912; EC-W to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in *The Times*, 13 March 1912; NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B10/17, draft of letter from EC-W to the press, [? March 1912]; *The Times*, 1 April 1912.
- 39 *The Times*, 6 June 1912; correspondence in the NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, file B10.
- 40 *Simple Story*, pp. 123, 135 and 137; *The Times*, 11 June and 29 July 1913 and 10 February 1914; correspondence in the NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, file B11.
- 41 University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections Department, Masterman Papers 29/2/2/2, Lucy Masterman diary entry for 18 June 1913, cited in Richard Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness* (London, 2007), p. 99. I am most grateful to Dr Toye for providing me with a typescript transcript of relevant materials from the Masterman Papers at Birmingham and photocopies of relevant correspondence from the Churchill Papers held at Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 42 Churchill College, Cambridge, Churchill Papers CHAR 1/107/11-13, EC-W to Churchill, 23 September 1913; University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections Department, Masterman Papers 29/2/2/2, Lucy Masterman diary entry for 18 June 1913.
- 43 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B12/41, EC-W to Arthur Henderson, undated [autumn of 1918] (draft).
- 44 *Ibid.* B14/83, EC-W to Churchill, 17 November 1922 (copy).
- 45 *Ibid.* B13/41, EC-W to Sir Thomas Jones, 20 October 1931 (draft); B13./42, Jones to EC-W, 23 October 1931.
- 46 *Ibid.* B14/92, EC-W to Churchill, 27 June 1940 ('Personal') (copy); B14/93, Churchill to EC-W, 28 June 1940 (copy).
- 47 See the interesting portrait in the 'Literary Profiles' column in the *Western Mail*, 4 June 1952.

Letters (continued from page 2)

election up to and including 1961. However, in 1962, he defected to the Liberal Party and became the sole Liberal member of the LCC until its demise in 1964. Hambly was a surgeon and a Cornishman; he claimed to be last person left who spoke Cornish. He had to be dissuaded from resigning to fight a by-election in Lewisham, which he would certainly have lost!

In outer London, although it could be claimed that the Liberal control of Finchley Borough Council had certain demographic similarities with Richmond, that was certainly not the case with the early Liberal victories in West Ham, led by David Brooke and Norman Phillips.

I don't disparage the value of oral history as evinced by

such meetings but it does have a tendency to slip into the 'How we won Abercromby' mode. The intellectual rigour of the Liberal Democrat History Group and its journal need to be safeguarded by careful attention to the context.

One final curiosity of the 1960s in London was that the only comprehensive book of the 1965 London Borough election results was published by the Liberal Party's Local Government Department. The new Greater London Council had its own information department but at the time it took a narrow view of its terms of reference and would only publish the GLC results. I took the view as the party's Local Government Officer that the borough results should be published

and that it would be a minor coup if the party did it. We duly did so and the book was for a very long time the only available comprehensive source.

Michael Meadowcroft

Great Liberals?

I am glad that in his letter Professor Vernon Bogdanor (*Journal of Liberal History* 58, spring 2008) has tempered the recent hagiographies of David Lloyd George with a reminder of the great man's Achilles heel – that that of his penchant for autocratic leaders, coupled with his admiration of Hitler. Certainly Lloyd George advocated, and in office introduced, admirable reforming measures, but his actions in supporting the Black and Tans in Ireland

and in dealing with strikes through the Emergency Powers Act, and his opposition to a limited franchise for women, are only three examples of decidedly illiberal policies.

Is it not a fact that Lloyd George's opportunism almost destroyed the Liberal Party itself, and most certainly provided the circumstances through which the Labour Party was able to replace the Liberal Party as the major opposition to the Conservatives?

Not one biographer of Lloyd George has been able to explain his admiration for Hitler – an admiration that largely ignored Hitler's persecution of the Jews and his murder of opponents of the Nazi regime, evidence of

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