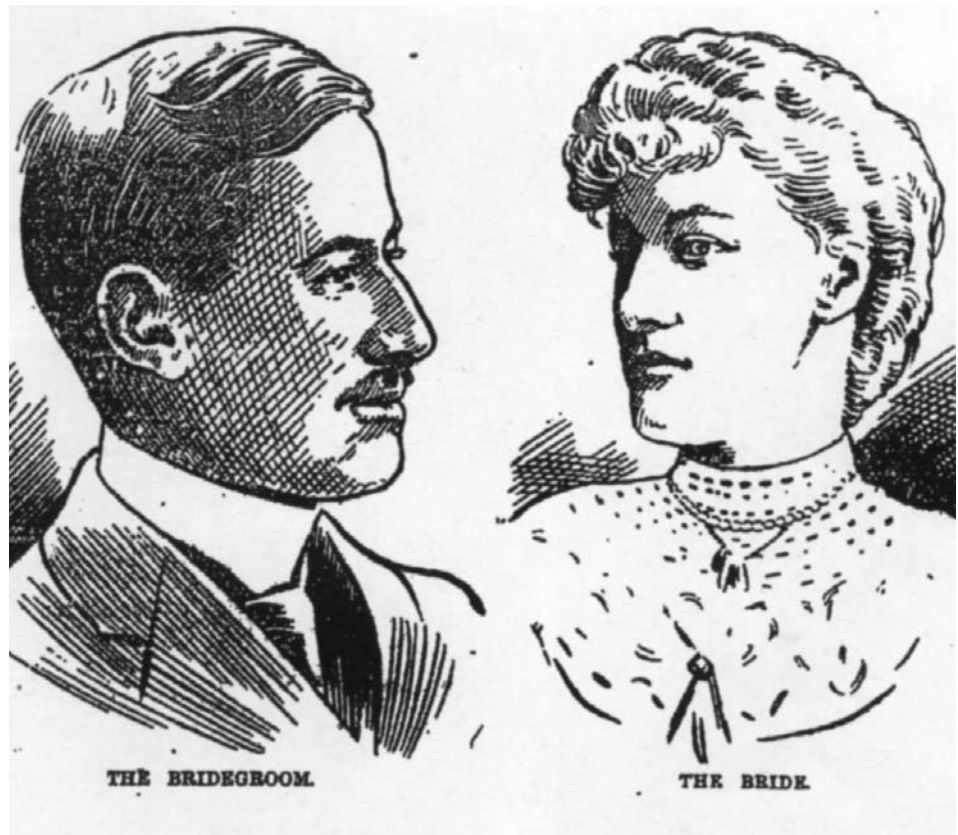


'THE STRANGE

In the October 1900 'khaki election', Liberals barely improved on their disastrous 1895 performance. Facing the Unionists' ruthless playing of the patriotic card,¹ the party could not even find a candidate in 139 English constituencies and only in Wales did its share of the vote increase. A few formerly safe seats like Derby and Lancaster were regained in close fights, but the net gain was a mere six, and the party remained hopelessly outgunned in both Houses of Parliament. But through the gloom shone one utterly unexpected shaft of Liberal sunlight: the capture of North Westmorland, a rural fastness of valleys, fells, lakes and sheep, which had known only Tory MPs since Napoleonic times. Yet the new MP did not behave as expected. **Andrew Connell** tells 'the strange story of Mr Rigg'.²



IN THE old county town of Appleby the sitting Conservative³ suffered the humiliation of seeing his 17.4 per cent majority dissolve into a losing margin of 11.4 per cent,⁴ a defeat all the more embarrassing for being at the hands of a youthful Liberal candidate selected barely a month before polling day.

Coming early among the English county declarations, what *The Times* deemed a 'rather remarkable victory' caused 'great excitement'.⁵ In remote Langdale the arrival of the result by telegraph from Appleby aroused 'consternation and dismay, exorbitant joy and humiliating grief', the Conservative *Westmorland Gazette* reported, adding: 'As a

E CASE OF MR RIGG'

political omen North Westmorland proves absolutely nothing.⁶ This assessment seemed amply borne out both by the outcome of the 1900 general election, and by Westmorland's reversion within a decade to another century of Toryism. But I shall argue that this was no mere freak result; North Westmorland Liberals had stumbled on the ideal candidate who, but for a mysterious aberration, might have served as a role model for a type of Liberal MP equipped to resist the almost total annexation of rural England by the Conservatives from 1910 onwards.

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For two centuries Westmorland elections were dominated by the county's largest landowners, the Lowther family; through them local Conservatism acquired its distinctive pale yellow favours while Liberals wore blue. From 1774 until 1892 the county seat was represented in every parliament by at least one Lowther, and from 1832 to 1880 no election was even contested.⁷ But Non-conformity was strong among local voters newly enfranchised by the 1884 Reform Act,⁸ and in October 1885 the Hon. William Lowther beat off the Liberal

challenge of James Whitehead by just 10 votes in the new single-member constituency of North Westmorland. A decade later the seat looked much less marginal. Gladstone's commitment to Irish home rule was a vote-loser in an area in which Roman Catholicism was regarded as alien and sinister, and owner-occupier farmers, who outnumbered tenants,⁹ were suspicious of the merest hint of compulsory land purchase. By 1895, with 5,023 votes cast in the usual high turnout, the Conservative majority had swollen to 873.

The winner did not even bear the customary name. In 1891 William Lowther had surprised his constituency party by telling them he would not stand again, and with no other family member available,¹⁰ the Conservatives adopted Sir Joseph Savory, a carpetbagger London goldsmith and former Lord Mayor. Rotund and balding, a dull speaker with limited local connections, Savory was an eminently undistinguished figure whose increased majorities in 1892 and 1895 demonstrated the extent to which Westmorland men of modest property were deserting Liberalism. He seemed destined to remain backbench lobby fodder for as long as he chose,

and the circumstances of the 1900 election might have been expected further to boost his vote in a locality with a strong military tradition, well represented among the servicemen in South Africa. But 'in vain did the Tory leaders invoke the aid of Khaki, claiming Bobs, Buller and B.-P. as their own particular possessions';¹¹ Sir Joseph was sensationally unseated.

The explanation, the *Yorkshire Post* lamented, lay in 'petty, personal and local questions',¹² issues of probity no more than delicately alluded to on Liberal platforms, but 'discussed among farmers and tradesmen in the freer intercourse of the market or tavern'. Some looked askance at their MP's involvement in two protracted court cases, one concerning a quarry near Kirkby Stephen, the other the City Electric Light Company in London; but the really damaging allegation was that he was enriching himself by robbing local farmers. Near Appleby lies Brackenber Moor, a large area of common upland pasture which was – and still is – used for military manoeuvres. Compensation from the War Office was due to all with common rights, but rumour persisted that Sir Joseph, who had sought to

Left: The bridegroom and the bride: Richard and Gertrude Rigg; *Kendal Mercury*, 16 September 1904

boost his local standing by buying up land and manorial lordships, had pocketed most of it. His protestations that this was 'absolutely false', that the money had all gone to a committee of commoners, and 'not one penny has passed through my hands',¹³ were greeted with scepticism. North Westmorland Conservatives braced themselves for a reduced majority; but in the prevailing patriotic climate it was inconceivable that the seat would fall to an inexperienced opponent with threadbare Liberal credentials.

The shock victor, Richard Rigg, thirty-four years younger than Savory, was a native of Windermere, where the family had a coaching business and his father John owned the handsome hotel that overlooks the railway station. Educated across the lake at Hawkshead Grammar School, he passed his Cambridge Locals before he was fourteen¹⁴ and in January 1892 transferred to the nearest public school, Sedbergh, but stayed only one term. The school register, generally explicit about departures under a cloud, simply records Rigg as having been 'withdrawn'; plausible explanations are the outbreak of scarlet fever in the school and the coincidental prolonged absence through ill-health of the celebrated headmaster Henry Hart, whose muscular Christianity had transformed Sedbergh's reputation, though not its sanitary arrangements.¹⁵ How Rigg spent the next five years, other than in part-time soldiery as a commissioned officer in the Second Volunteer Battalion of the Border Regiment, which he joined in 1896, is unclear. There is no evidence of extensive travelling. Possibly he assisted his uncle in the running of the hotel, his father having retired to devote more time to hunting and freemasonry; but the path before him was that of a gentleman of means.

When Sir Joseph Savory became North Westmorland's

The Liberal press exulted as their handsome, dark-moustached young hero charmed meeting after meeting with his 'courtesy, amiability and effective speeches ...'

member, his niece recorded, the Rigg family were 'pillars of Conservatism';¹⁶ certainly in 1892 the Misses Rigg of Windermere adorned a Primrose League gathering,¹⁷ and in the 1895 election John Rigg supplied coaches to convey Conservative voters on polling day.¹⁸ The timing of and reasons for his son's conversion to Liberalism, apparently with parental blessing, remain obscure. Lady Carlisle would subsequently tell her biographer son-in-law that Richard saw the light while up at Oxford;¹⁹ but in fact he went to Gonville & Caius, a Cambridge college not renowned for radicalism. And although local press reports in September 1900 stated he had left university in 1898, Caius' records show that he matriculated in 1897, passed two parts of the Law tripos in 1898 and 1899 and took his degree the following year.²⁰

By 1900 he had been called to the Bar of the Inner Temple, though he was never to practise,²¹ and was an instructor in musketry in the Volunteers, with the rank of captain. Like other socially conscientious middle-class men, he patronised Friendly Societies, his most durable connection being with the Oddfellows, for whom he acted as treasurer.²² With an evident predilection for committees, he was also president of a cycling club, captain of a Boys' Brigade battalion, member of the Westmorland Football Association, Conservator of the River Kent Fishery District, an enthusiastic freemason²³ and churchwarden in his home parish of St Mary's Applethwaite. His faith was evangelical, and he was an impassioned teetotaler.

Early in September 1900, a few days after his twenty-third birthday, Richard Rigg was announced as Liberal candidate for North Westmorland. Of his immediate impact on a demoralised local party²⁴ there was no doubt. The Liberal press exulted as their handsome,

dark-moustached young hero charmed meeting after meeting with his 'courtesy, amiability and effective speeches ... His very youth, coupled with his marvellous grasp of political principles and facility for their eloquent and popular expression, render him infinitely more qualified to represent the needs of a constituency like North Westmorland than a goody-goody and fossilised antediluvian like Sir Joseph Savory.'²⁵ From the platform Rigg, who had volunteered for service in South Africa but was not called up because of his parliamentary candidacy, denounced not the war itself but the way it was being managed. Patricia Lynch has suggested that Liberals in 1900 'who adopted a moderate imperialist stance ... ran the risk of appearing to neglect the party's traditions of social reform', these being 'mutually exclusive alternatives'.²⁶ Not so for Rigg, whose 'vigorous exposition of advanced Liberal views' *The Times* remarked on;²⁷ he supported state pensions, Lords reform, one man one vote, and greater public control over voluntary schools. The simple message of his posters was: 'Vote for Rigg, the local candidate: Unity of Empire and Old Age Pensions.'

'To say that Mr Rigg has taken the electorate by storm is to put it mildly', remarked the normally apolitical *Lakes Herald* on polling day. The *Westmorland Gazette* published an anxious appeal to its Conservative readers. The Liberals were a divided party, not to be trusted with the 'destinies of the Empire'; and voters must realise that they could not 'choose their member because of his qualities, or because they like him, without giving power to the party he supports'.²⁸ The count in Appleby confirmed the Conservatives' worst fears. Though most of the crowd waiting in the rain wore yellow favours, they cheered heartily the declaration

that Rigg had won with a majority of 579. A shocked Sir Joseph Savory pulled himself together sufficiently to make a gracious speech of congratulation before disappearing on the next train south. Richard Rigg, meanwhile, was borne shoulder-high through the crowded streets of Appleby, took the train to Kirkby Stephen to repeat the process and thence to Tebay where railway workers, reported to have voted solidly Liberal, sounded a volley of foghorns. His odyssey ended at Windermere station, where, through darkness and heavy rain, a band escorted his carriage down the hill to Bowness on the lakeside and all the way to Ambleside.²⁹

While the *Conservative Manchester Chronicle* consoled its readers with the comment that the Appleby result showed 'the overwhelming strength of Imperialist feeling in the country',³⁰ the Liberal *Carlisle Journal* rejoiced that 'the Tories and aristocracy of North Westmorland, with the Earl of Lonsdale at their head', had received 'the most staggering blow which has ever been dealt to them'. They might blame 'petty pique and narrow local topics', but this was a victory of Liberal policies appealing to the 'sturdy electors'.³¹ By happy coincidence Richard Rigg was the same age as the Younger Pitt when he was returned for the old rotten borough of Appleby in 1781. Perhaps he was destined for similar greatness? Even the *Daily Mail* approved: 'The baby of the house, he seems to be made of the right stuff'.³²

Not resting on his laurels, Appleby's youthful and energetic new MP 'nursed the constituency as it has never been nursed before or since'.³³ Unfailingly conscientious and courteous, he rarely refused invitations to attend functions and deliver earnest, well-crafted speeches, confident in the knowledge that every word would appear in the local press. And having taken up

a cause he remained faithful to it. As 'Brother Rigg' he told the Oddfellows that 'Friendly Societies are the creation of the working classes of this country ... the backbone of the land in health, thrift and self-denial'.³⁴ As President of the Vale of Eden Band of Hope, he admonished 3,000 children in their great annual demonstration in Appleby: 'You should never forget that in fighting drink you are fighting for the gospel of Christ. If you want a Christian country you must have a sober country, for drink is the fruitful mother of every social ill'.³⁵ Godliness, temperance and state education were his recurrent themes in halls, chapels and Liberal Clubs. 'The greatness of England depends upon the morality of its home life and the temperance of its people ... Our children must be brought up to become God-fearing and God-serving men and women ... The child of poor parents will by his perseverance be enabled to fight his way to the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge'.³⁶

Priggish though all this may sound to the modern ear, it helped confirm the popularity of the virtuous young Liberal MP, evident at the 1900 Liberal Boxing Night party in Appleby, a ten-hour marathon of tea, dinner and dance, with 350 guests.

The cheering which began on his rising was only interrupted by the singing again of 'for he's a jolly good fellow', followed by renewed shouting and clapping of hands. The hon. gentleman at last had to begin his remarks to the chairman in order to stop the cheering.³⁷

Equally at home at a Primitive Methodist bazaar or a Masonic dinner, his place in county society was further confirmed by appointment as a JP and promotion to the rank of major in the Volunteers. In September 1904 the press reported in exhaustive detail his marriage, by the Bishop of Barrow, to Miss Gertrude Anderson in her parish church of St Andrew,

Penrith; there were several hundred guests, many of whom had arrived by special train, 'crowded to a most uncomfortable degree' in the nave, while the galleries were thronged by the public.³⁸

Rigg's instant impact on the Liberal Party nationally was attested to by his election in February 1901 to the Executive Committee of the Eighty Club, over which no less a figure than the party leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, presided; at a club 'at home' in July he proposed the vote of thanks to the speaker, Sir William Harcourt.³⁹ But in the later claim that 'his early speeches at Westminster earned him a high place in the party',⁴⁰ there was more than a little journalistic licence. *Hansard's* columns reveal that he was true to Westmorland parliamentary custom in rarely addressing the Commons. He did not deliver his maiden speech until November 1902, when moving an amendment to the Education Bill. Consistent with his previously expressed view that schools should be more answerable to the public's elected representatives, he argued that councillors should be in the majority on education committees and free, without interference from the Board of Education, to co-opt additional members qualified by educational expertise rather than representation of some vested interest. Seconding, Alfred Emmott of Oldham congratulated his hon. friend on 'having at last successfully broken the silence he has so long maintained'. Lloyd George also spoke in support, but the amendment was soon withdrawn,⁴¹ and for the next two years Rigg did not speak again in the House.

Nevertheless Appleby Liberals speculated that their MP might be a future Prime Minister, following in the footsteps of former members for the borough, Pitt and Lord Liverpool;⁴² and the *Yorkshire Post*, describing Rigg as 'associated with an ambitious

Not resting on his laurels, Appleby's youthful and energetic new MP 'nursed the constituency as it has never been nursed before or since'.

band of young Liberals', claimed that 'his Parliamentary status is not to be measured by his lack of assertiveness'.⁴³ He tabled occasional written questions, seconded a motion without speaking, and in August 1904, appropriately for the Treasurer of the Anti-Tobacco Society, presented the first reading of a Bill 'to provide for the prevention of Juvenile Smoking'.⁴⁴

Though the local Conservative press poked occasional fun at such 'fads',⁴⁵ Rigg was not an easy target. In the aftermath of victory he had praised Sir Joseph Savory for being 'honourable, manly and straightforward', adding 'Whether you agree or disagree with me politically, I hope the day is far distant when I shall forfeit the love and affection of both parties in North Westmorland'.⁴⁶ He made a point of joining Captain Joscelyne Bagot, Conservative MP for South Westmorland, in a bipartisan demand that Poor Law Guardians should be forbidden by law to reduce the amount of outdoor relief awarded to people who were in receipt of Friendly Society allowances;⁴⁷ and his moralising speeches not only rarely criticised political opponents but even commended the hapless Prime Minister Balfour.⁴⁸ 'I have talked with men of all political shades in the county,' said Appleby Liberals' chairman, 'and I can safely say that personally Mr Rigg has not a single enemy'.⁴⁹

To oppose him at the next election North Westmorland Conservatives chose Major George Noble of Newcastle, a Lloyd's underwriter with a gallant military record but no electoral experience. Their hopes of regaining the seat were not improved by the Unionist rift between Balfour and Chamberlain over tariff reform. Rigg toured the constituency early in 1904 with a series of speeches extolling the virtues of free trade,⁵⁰ and the Parliamentary Liberal Party made hay with a

string of by-election victories as well as the acquisition of Winston Churchill. The approaching election landslide was casting its shadow, and Richard Rigg's political future seemed as secure as the Lakeland fells overlooking his newly acquired marital home in Windermere.

So it was with utter astonishment that Herbert Coutts, president of the North Westmorland Liberal Association, read on 16 November 1904 a letter from his MP offering his resignation. To Richard Rigg's 'painful regret' there had gradually been borne on him 'the conviction that my views and opinions upon some of the most important questions of the day are not in accord with those of the leaders of the Liberal Party'.⁵¹ He listed the issues that particularly concerned him, later expounded more fully to the press. He believed that, for the sake of imperial prosperity, the government was right to support the use of Chinese labour in South Africa; he approved of the Aliens Act because his experiences at an East End mission had convinced him of the need to keep the 'lowest class of Europeans' out of Britain; he supported the principles of the Education Act; and though not a protectionist he believed that imperial preference merited serious consideration.⁵²

What prompted this bizarre conversion? Lady Carlisle would later claim that Rigg wanted a knighthood as a reward for his sensational election success in 1900 and deserted the Liberals when it did not materialise.⁵³ There is no contemporary supporting evidence other than *Punch's* limerick, whose hint at personal ambition may owe more to the need for a rhyme than to the actual circumstances:⁵⁴

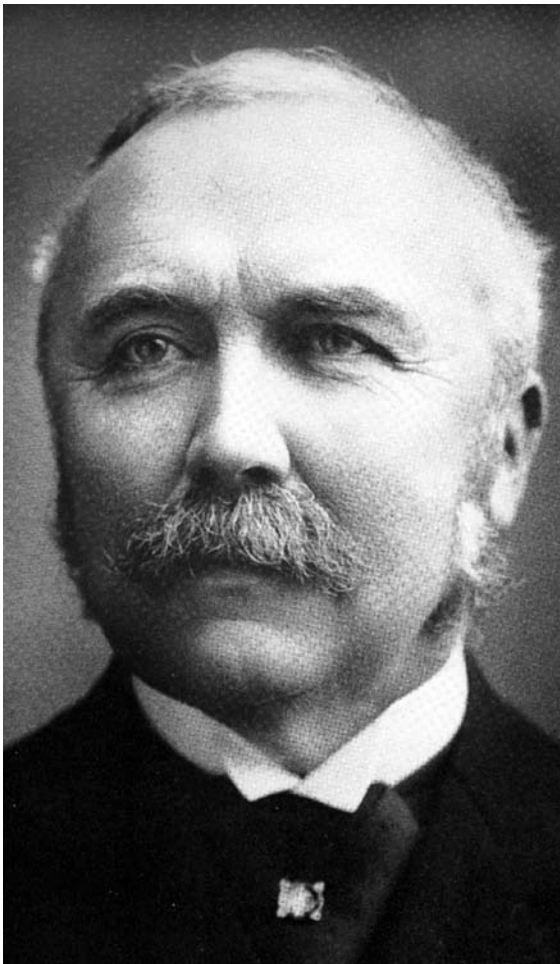
There was a young member
name RIGG
Who grew weary of being a
Whig.
So, thirsting for glory,
He emerged as a Tory

And gallantly went the whole
pig.

Some speculated that his new bride had changed her husband's politics;⁵⁵ but when a pre-arranged and now distinctly awkward Liberal Ladies' At Home was held in Windermere a few days after the storm broke, it was the MP's wife who played hostess while his mother absented herself. Rigg's insistence that it was 'absolutely impossible' for him to support the Liberal leadership may have been provoked by some Westminster quarrel, but the press offers no clues; on behalf of the Parliamentary Party, Herbert Samuel⁵⁶ was content to point out that Rigg had voted without demur on all the points he now raised. Perhaps as he became more and more a figure in the county establishment he was absorbing the attitudes of his social circle; perhaps, as a fastidious man, he found the rhetoric of 'New Liberalism' vulgar;⁵⁷ again, evidence is lacking. Like his fellow-Anglican Gladstone, Rigg admired the Nonconformist conscience, and the answer may lie solely with his inmost thoughts: 'I have the satisfaction of feeling that what I have done was conscientious and right'.⁵⁸

The veteran Liberal Sir Wilfrid Lawson remarked, 'It's a first principle of Liberalism that a man has the right to change his mind. He has been three years a Liberal; let him be a Tory for three years and then come back and be a Liberal again'.⁵⁹ Rigg's local party took a less sanguine view. They accepted his proffered resignation, but puzzlement turned to fury when the MP, having initially said that he would stand in the by-election as an independent, then met with the Conservative candidate and announced that they were in agreement on most matters. *The Times* wondered whether Major Noble might step aside for Rigg, who was quoted as saying that 'he would doubtless be a

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Parliamentary candidate again'. By now the press was claiming that the defection had been 'whispered for weeks past' and there had been 'informal negotiations with Conservatives'. Rigg was adamant that he had 'acted absolutely on his own initiative' with 'no collusion',⁶⁰ but he attended the next meeting of Windermere Conservatives and was enrolled as a member.

Portraits of 'Dicky Rigg' were reportedly being stamped on in the homes of Liberals outraged that a temperance warrior could join the party responsible for the Licensing Act.⁶¹ A tactful decision to return some wedding presents did not prevent his servants, so the MP claimed, from being insulted in the streets of Windermere, while he himself was 'literally inundated with threatening and abusive letters' and even struck in the face on his mother's doorstep by a muffled assailant. Early in December he wrote from London: 'I have had

'That great Christian statesman, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman' – Leader of the Liberal Party 1899–1908

to leave my house in the dead of night under police protection to escape Radical ruffianism.' *La Petite Republique* embroidered the tale: 'M. Rigg ... has been compelled to fly ... and take refuge in London, the police having declared that they cannot answer for his life.'⁶² He let it be known that his health had broken down under the strain, and on doctor's orders he and his wife would spend Christmas on the continent. Meanwhile a Liberal reporter in Windermere claimed that the 'overwrought' Rigg's allegations of violence and intimidation were mere 'Illusions, Hallucinations and Delusions'. His dramatic flight from the town had in reality amounted to boarding the last train of the evening on a station platform deserted apart from his father and one policeman.⁶³

Though Rigg did not formally apply for the Chiltern Hundreds until February 1905, the by-election campaign to succeed him began at once. On the advice of Lady Carlisle, North Westmorland Liberals selected her personal secretary, Leif Jones, a fluent writer and temperance orator from a distinguished Welsh Nonconformist family, and an experienced, though as yet unsuccessful, election campaigner.⁶⁴ The poll took place early in March and, for all his eloquent exploitation of Conservative disarray over tariff reform, Jones saw the Liberal majority fall from 579 to 220.⁶⁵ In the January 1906 general election he faced a new challenger in the Earl of Kerry, an amiable Etonian army officer actively supported by the fifth Earl of Lonsdale, Hugh Lowther, taking time out from his round of pleasures. The Conservative campaign beat the Imperial drum against the 'pro-Boer' Jones, and despite the national landslide which won them the neighbouring Kendal seat, the Liberals held on in Appleby by a majority of just three. Leif Jones was as much relieved as

triumphant when he told his supporters that there was now 'Blue Sky over Westmorland'.

Richard Rigg took no part in either election.⁶⁶ Politely declining invitations to stand as a Conservative in such unpromising seats as Burnley and Barnard Castle, he restricted his political activity to appearing on a platform in Cocker-mouth to support Sir John Randles, who lost to Sir Wilfrid Lawson, but regained the seat six months later, after the old radical's death. Rigg attended the funeral on behalf of the Church of England Temperance Society, and Sir Wilfrid's prediction that he would be no more than three years a Tory was looking ever more prescient. Addressing a meeting of the UK Alliance⁶⁷ on Blackpool sands, Rigg told his audience that 'they must deplore the fact that the Unionist party was so liquor-ridden, and when it made itself so subservient to the drink trade it deserved to be beaten'; and CB was the 'best temperance Prime Minister the country had ever known'.⁶⁸ To the Oddfellows he reaffirmed his support for old age pensions, though he believed they would be unnecessary if there were comprehensive temperance reform; and he expressed the ambition 'some day to go to the House of Commons again to represent the interests of friendly societies'.⁶⁹

By 1907 Rigg was telling audiences that the defeat of the Liberal Education Bill by the Lords would be 'nothing short of a national calamity', and 'the men who insist on denominational instruction are driving the Bible out of schools'. He himself was an 'evangelical Christian' and he deplored the 'Church going to the brewer'. It was shameful that churches administered alcoholic communion wine, for 'many young men got their fondness for drink there'. The duty of the Church was to assist 'that Christian statesman Sir Henry Campbell-

Bannerman' in fighting the liquor trade; and he recalled that when he was in the Commons those members with a financial interest in drink 'were rich enough to buy up all the rest'.⁷⁰

The Conservative Party was not the obvious home for a man proud to be called a 'fanatic' in his opposition to strong drink and tobacco; and at the 1907 Christmas dinner of Kirkby Stephen Liberal Club Rigg's return to the fold was announced, along with an assurance that he was 'practically pledged to fight for the Liberals at the next general election in a neighbouring constituency'.⁷¹ A prompt Conservative response to this desertion came at the Primrose League New Year's Day meeting in Appleby. Mixing his biblical references, the chairman derided the 'coat of many colours' of the 'wandering sheep', who had strayed in search of support for his 'temperance propaganda'.⁷²

Although Rigg addressed meetings of Oddfellows, temperance organisations and the Cumberland and Westmorland Association in London in the course of 1908, he was not seen on Liberal platforms and barely mentioned in the *North Westmorland Liberal Monthly*, which commenced in June.⁷³ In January 1909 he was reported to have sent his two-guineas subscription and an 'interesting letter' to Penrith Liberal Club, but any more active political involvement was precluded by his appointment in March as High Sheriff of Westmorland. It was in this capacity that in the January 1910 general election Richard Rigg had to announce from the steps of Appleby Shire Hall the 3,335 votes cast for Lancelot Sanderson (Conservative) and 2,868 for Leif Jones (Liberal). Out of just five English county seats held by the Liberals in 1900 that were now Unionist, North Westmorland registered the greatest swing.⁷⁴ It is hard to imagine that Rigg

did not reflect that he could have held the seat.

Two months later, in full flow at Penrith Liberal Club's annual social, he denounced opponents of Lloyd George's budget, whose 'speeches were one long advocacy of their own selfish interests ... land, land, land, property, property, property, dividends, dividends'.⁷⁵ Looking forward to the end of plural voting, often blamed by Liberals for defeats in county seats, he assured his audience that 'a brighter dawn was coming for Liberalism when they saw Home Rule for every county and no invasion of alien voters'. A speaker from the floor pointedly remarked that they would all like to see Mr Rigg back in parliament. A further general election was expected as a quasi-plebiscite on the Parliament Act, and in May 1910 North Westmorland Liberals were reported to be in the brink of selecting a candidate to replace Leif Jones, who had said his goodbyes and was seeking a safe seat elsewhere.⁷⁶ In June Richard Rigg made an open-air speech to the largest ever Band of Hope rally in Appleby; in October he addressed Penrith Liberal Club, whose president he now was, for an hour. But when the North Westmorland Liberal candidate was finally announced in late November it was not Rigg but another ex-MP, Philip Whitwell Wilson, scion of a well-known Kendal Liberal family, who had sat for St Pancras. In the fortnight before polling day he did his best, but the margin of Conservative victory increased.

North Westmorland saw one more election, in October 1915, when Henry Cecil Lowther, son of the former MP, was unopposed.⁷⁷ In 1918 North and South Westmorland were merged into one seat, held for the Conservatives by John Wakefield Weston, whose parliamentary career from 1913 to 1924 consisted of four uncontested elections and a single speech. Every inch of

Westmorland would continue to be represented by Conservatives until 2005, when the Liberal Democrat Tim Farron won Westmorland & Lonsdale. This constituency does not include most of the old North Westmorland seat, which is now part of Penrith & the Border, still one of the safest Conservative seats in Britain.

Arguing for recognition of the value of local studies in informing analysis of the development of political cultures, Jon Lawrence rightly stresses the 'need for extensive new research into the 'politics of locality' which recognises ... the peculiarities of place'.⁷⁸ North Westmorland, and especially the Eden Valley, was – and still is – home to a relatively static society which not only valued candidates with genuine local credentials and unimpeachable morality, but also, in a manner Patricia Lynch suggests was typical of rural constituencies, took at face value claims to place the good of the community above party considerations;⁷⁹ of such virtues Richard Rigg was a paradigm.

To the peculiarities of place we might add those of personality. Growing up in a social milieu becoming increasingly Conservative, Rigg abruptly embraced a Liberalism that was simultaneously Imperialist and in its social aspects 'New'. Though his time in the House seems to have been an anti-climax after the instant fame he achieved in getting there, four years was hardly long enough to determine how far he might rise in Parliament; he was only 27 when he resigned. At the very least, given his Westmorland roots and widespread popularity, he could have emulated previous county MPs by occupying his seat until retirement, ennoblement or death, had his conscience not prompted him to desert his party just as it was poised to sweep the country.

Richard Rigg had an apparent taste for swimming against

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the tide, and it is quite conceivable that as a born-again Liberal he would in December 1910 have recaptured his former seat. He chose instead to devote the last three decades of his life to an extraordinary range of activities, described by *The Times* as 'A Career of Public Service'.⁸⁰ During the 1914–18 war he received the Territorial Decoration, was a Commissioner for National War Savings, chaired the Ministry of Labour panel for Employment of ex-Officers and in 1918 was awarded the OBE. For a man praised for patience and good humour, a prodigious memory for facts and faces and a fluent, incisive tongue, this was just a beginning. A quick glance at the spectrum of his responsibilities takes in chairmanship of the Trained Nurses Annuity Fund; presidency of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries; presidency of the National Temperance Hospital, a ward of which was named after him; mastery of the Glovers Company; mayoralty of the City of Westminster; and many more. Political activity is hinted at only by the vice-chairmanship of the Abbey Constitutional (usually a euphemism for Conservative) Association; perhaps he ultimately returned to his roots. He certainly acquired a vast circle of friends in the course of public life, and, though a lifelong teetotaler, mellowed to the extent of readily standing his round if a social occasion required it.⁸¹

Early in World War II Richard and Gertrude Rigg retired to Hove. In 1942 they died within months of each other. There were no children and, in the absence of any surviving personal papers, no clues as to whether he had any regrets as to what he himself, his native county, his party and his country might have lost when he turned his back on a life in politics.

Andrew Connell, whose tutors at Oxford included Kenneth O. Morgan, is a history teacher at the

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comprehensive school in Appleby and an elected member of the General Teaching Council for England. His work on Westmorland parliamentary politics has also appeared in Northern History and Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society.

- 1 Paul Readman's 'The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900' in *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001), convincingly reinstates the view that the Boer War was the dominant issue that in most constituencies cost the Liberals working-class votes
- 2 Headline to the editorial leader in the [*Kendal*] *Mercury*, 2 December 1904.
- 3 In North Westmorland the term 'Unionist' was rarely used by either side.
- 4 Contemporary election result reports did not calculate percentages; see F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (London, 1972), p. 412. Craig supposed that Rigg subsequently became a Liberal Unionist, but, as we shall see, this is an error, albeit understandable.
- 5 *The Times*, 8 October 1900.
- 6 [*Westmorland*] *Gazette*, 13 October 1900.
- 7 Before 1832 there was one two-member borough, Appleby, split between Lowther and Tufton nominees. The great Reform Bill disfranchised Appleby, and created a single-member borough of Kendal. The Lowthers had no influence there and it returned Liberals until it was subsumed into South Westmorland in 1885.
- 8 See James Burgess, *History of Cumbrian Methodism* (Kendal, 1980) and the same author's monumental and unpublished Sheffield University PhD thesis, *A Religious History of Cumbria* (1984).
- 9 See C. E. Searle's unpublished University of Essex PhD thesis, *This Odd Corner of England* (1984), pp. 328, 384 and M. E. Shepherd, 'The Small Owner in Cumbria' in *Northern History* xxxv (1999).
- 10 One son, James, already sat for

neighbouring Mid-Cumberland (Penrith), and a distant cousin, also James, for Thanet.

- 11 [*Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland*] *Herald*, an avowedly Radical (by local standards) paper, 13 October 1900.
- 12 *Gazette*, 13 October 1900; the local press often quoted controversial points from other provincial newspapers rather than taking responsibility for them.
- 13 Letter from Sir Joseph Savory to the Conservative [*Penrith*] *Observer* 2 October 1900.
- 14 I am grateful to David Shaw for information from the admissions register. We can assume that Rigg boarded by the week at Hawkshead.
- 15 I am grateful to Sedbergh's archivist, Elspeth Griffiths, for access to the admissions register. The *Sedberghian* of March 1892 reports on the scarlet fever epidemic, and the unrelated illness of Hart, who would also have been Rigg's housemaster, as he was placed in the School House. It took a succession of epidemics to persuade the Governors in 1906 to appoint a school medical officer.
- 16 Undated Memoir of Sir Joseph Savory, possibly written in 1921, the year of his death, by his niece Helen P. Savory. There is a copy in Kendal Record Office.
- 17 *Gazette*, 25 June 1892.
- 18 *Gazette*, 27 July 1895.
- 19 Charles Roberts, *Radical Countess* (Carlisle, 1962), p. 80.
- 20 I am grateful to James Cox, archivist at Caius. The report in the *Amble-side Herald & Lakes News*, 28 September 1900, may just be another case of the press getting it wrong, or it may be that J. C. Shepherd, Rigg's Ambleside agent, wanted to obscure his man's inexperience. Local papers also spoke of Rigg's 'brilliance' at Cambridge; in fact he took an ordinary degree and won no prizes.
- 21 See *The Times* obituary of Rigg, 1 Sept 1942.
- 22 The local press carried frequent reports of Rigg's speeches to gatherings of Oddfellows; and Penrith Buffaloes thought well enough of him to name a lodge in his honour.
- 23 A fairly comprehensive list of public bodies to which Rigg belonged

- appears in *Who Was Who, 1941–50*.
- 24 The state of the local Liberal Party can be inferred from the absence in the columns of the *Mercury* or the *Herald* of reports of any activity earlier in 1900. Prior to Rigg's selection he is not mentioned, nor are any other names trailed.
- 25 *Herald*, 1 September 1900.
- 26 Patricia Lynch, *The Liberal Party in Rural England 1885–1910* (Oxford, 2003), p. 156.
- 27 *The Times*, 8 October 1900. From a different perspective he was 'an advocate of every exploded fad' (*Observer*, 25 September 1900).
- 28 *Gazette*, 6 October 1900.
- 29 The events of polling day were reported at length by e.g. the *Observer*, 9 October 1900.
- 30 Quoted in the *Gazette*, 13 October 1900. However, a correspondent in the *Liberal Manchester Guardian*, 10 October 1900, insisted that Rigg's domestic radicalism had appealed to his audiences more than his imperialism.
- 31 *Carlisle Journal*, 9 October 1900.
- 32 *Herald*, 13 October 1900, carried comments from the provincial and national press on Rigg's victory.
- 33 *Observer*, 1 September 1942, following his death on 29 August; *The Times*' obituary also appeared on the 1st, the *Herald* and the *Gazette* on the 5th.
- 34 *Penrith Observer*, 22 January 1901. He was speaking from the Chair to Appleby Oddfellows.
- 35 *Penrith Observer*, 18 June 1901.
- 36 Speech at Appleby Liberal Club's Christmas Party, reported in *Penrith Observer*, 30 December 1901.
- 37 *Observer*, 31 December 1900. This traditionally Conservative paper gave Rigg generous coverage.
- 38 *Kendal Mercury*, 16 September 1904.
- 39 *Eighty Club Yearbook 1901 et seq.* For a brief outline of the origin and purposes of the Eighty Club, see H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone* (Oxford, 1997) p. 361.
- Rigg came fifth out of twenty-seven candidates for the ten-man Executive, with 117 votes.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Parliamentary Debates* 4th Series vol. cxv (28 November 1902) col. 749–51.
- 42 *Herald*, 2 January 1904.
- 43 *Yorkshire Post*, 22 November 1904, quoted in *Observer*, 29 November 1904. Conservative papers stressed the significance of Rigg's defection from the Liberals.
- 44 *Parliamentary Debates* 4th Series vol. cxxxv (4 August 1904) col. 1002. Many of its provisions were eventually included within the 1908 'Children's Charter'.
- 45 *Gazette*, 5 November 1904.
- 46 *Observer*, 31 December 1900.
- 47 *Mercury*, 1 July 1904.
- 48 *Observer*, 8 November 1904.
- 49 *Herald*, 2 January 1904.
- 50 Although Joseph Chamberlain sought to marry tariff reform and Empire, there was a sound Liberal Imperialist argument for free trade. See Paul Readman, 'The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early Twentieth Century' in *Twentieth Century British History* vol. 12, no. 3 (2001), pp. 282–85.
- 51 The correspondence was reproduced in the *Mercury*, 25 November 1904, and in *The Times* on the same day.
- 52 *Herald*, 26 November 1904.
- 53 See note 17 above.
- 54 *Punch*, 30 November 1904. That this was simply headed 'Lines from North Westmorland' without further explanation indicates that Rigg's defection was by then a national news item.
- 55 See note 62 below.
- 56 The long-awaited entry of Samuel, seven years older than Rigg, into the Commons was delayed by repeated failure to capture South Oxon; he was eventually returned for the safe seat of Cleveland in a by-election in 1902. In June 1903 Rigg and Samuel, rising Liberal stars, were stewards at an Eighty Club House Dinner.
- Rigg's subsequent support for the anti-Semitic Aliens Bill raises intriguing, but so far unanswered, questions as to the relationship between the two.
- 57 Dr Jon Lawrence, in correspondence with the author, has speculated that Rigg may have been uncomfortable with 'the emerging populist style of the New Liberal politics' and its 'vulgar exploitation' of issues like Chinese slavery.
- 58 *Herald*, 11 February 1905.
- 59 *Observer*, 29 November 1904.
- 60 *The Times*, 26 November 1904.
- 61 *Observer*, 29 November 1904.
- 62 Quoted in *The Sedberghian* vol. xxv, no. 6 (1905). *Petite République* added: 'this abnormal state of things has been created by the policy of M. Chamberlain.'
- 63 See A. N. Connell, 'Blue Sky over Westmorland', pp. 200–09 in *Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Archaeological & Antiquarian Society* 3rd series, vol. VI (2006).
- 64 Roberts, *Radical Countess* pp. 81–87. See also article by David M. Fahey on Leif Jones in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals*, ed. J. O. Baylea and N. J. Gossman (New York, 1988), which comments on the degree of intimacy between the Countess and her secretary.
- 65 J. A. Spender's *Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London 1923), vol. ii, p. 164, misleadingly presents the 1905 North Westmorland by-election as a Liberal capture from the government; Rigg never sat in the House as a Conservative.
- 66 According to the Lady Carlisle, Richard's parents campaigned for the Conservative in the by-election 'to prevent any Liberal winning what he had relinquished' (Roberts, *Radical Countess*, p.86).
- 67 The Alliance was a national temperance organisation whose president was Rigg's successor as Appleby's MP, Leif Jones.
- 68 *Herald*, 25 August 1906.
- 69 *Herald*, 18 August and 22 September 1906.
- 70 *Herald*, 5 January 1907.
- 71 *Mercury*, 27 December 1907. Rigg's belated apologies for absence were conveyed by veteran local activist Dr T. H. Gibson, who also assured the meeting that Mrs Rigg was a keen Liberal and had played no part in her husband's earlier break with the party.
- 72 *Observer*, 7 January 1907.
- 73 The British Library holds a complete set of this publication, which folded in the summer of 1910.
- 74 See Craig, *Election Results*. The others were Saffron Walden, Louth, Rugby and Cricklade. Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (London, 1967) discusses each seat, but there is no discernible common thread. Even Homer nods, however, and what he says about Rigg is inaccurate (p. 340).
- 75 *Herald*, 19 March 1910.
- 76 He had three further spells in the Commons, sitting for Rushcliffe and Camborne before becoming Lord Rhayader in 1931. See his *Times* obituary 27 September 1939.
- 77 Sanderson had taken up a judicial appointment in India. It was considered patriotic not to contest wartime by-elections and a Liberal candidate was never mooted.
- 78 Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People* (Cambridge, 1998) p. 6.
- 79 Lynch, *Liberal Party in Rural England* pp. 98–102. She is discussing elections for local government, but this holds good for parliamentary ones, too.
- 80 *The Times*, 1 September 1942.
- 81 *Westmorland Gazette*, 5 September 1942: the longest and most affectionate tribute was from the former Conservative standard-bearer. The *Mercury* had long ceased publication, and the *Herald's* Liberalism was a distant memory.