

annoyed his coalition partners by retaining control of the Fund personally and by using the award (or the sale) of honours to poach Unionist supporters, and annoyed the King because of the character of many of those ennobled. Despite mounting parliamentary and press criticism, Lloyd George and the Unionist leader Austen Chamberlain doggedly refused to establish a public enquiry. This contributed to the political crisis of October 1922, when the Unionists decided to withdraw from the Coalition, overthrowing both Lloyd George and Chamberlain in the process.

The following year, under a new government, the Royal Commission on Honours reported, recommending that all names included on an honours list should be accompanied by a statement from the Prime Minister 'that no payment to a political fund was associated with the recommendation' (p. 111). Such a complete end to the old system was not particularly welcome to the new Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, and legislation was delayed for two years. And in the end the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act left a number of loopholes and made the person who had paid money in the expectation of an honour liable to prosecution along with the official or middleman who had sold the honour. As Cook observes, this provision effectively deterred recipients from ever admitting what had happened.

Although Gregory's role diminished substantially after Lloyd George's departure from office, he continued to take payments, often in advance of honours that were never in the end awarded. In 1932, however, he tried to sell Lieutenant Commander Billyard-Leake a knighthood, or baronetcy, for £12,000. Leake was not interested but strung him along and informed the authorities. In February 1933 Gregory was charged under the Honours Act. After some initial blustering, he eventually pleaded guilty, possibly being persuaded to do so by the Conservative Party to avoid revealing embarrassing details in court, or possibly as a plea bargain in order to avoid a long prison sentence. In

Maundy Gregory remains the only person ever to have been convicted under the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act.

the end he was fined £50 plus 50 guineas costs, and gaoled for two months. He remains the only person ever to have been convicted under the 1925 Act.

Gregory faced the possibility of a further enquiry over the death of Edith Rosse, an actress and friend who had altered her will in his favour a few days before her death. The enquiry was delayed, however, until after his release from gaol and flight to France, and in the end, although Rosse's body was exhumed on suspicion of poisoning, nothing could be proved. Cook hints that Gregory was being protected, but, as usual, fails to supply any evidence.

Gregory lived the rest of his life in France, receiving a pension, probably from the Conservative Party, on condition that he revealed nothing about his past. He kept his side of the bargain, and eventually died in September 1941 after being interned after the German invasion.

The main problem with *Cash for Honours* is that there is simply not enough known about Gregory – or not enough of interest, at any rate – to fill a decent-sized book, and too many details – such as the names of those who paid for honours – have never been revealed. The author is

therefore forced repeatedly to revert to speculation about what might have happened. Worse, he speculates at considerable length about things that Gregory might have been involved in, but almost certainly was not, including the forging of Roger Casement's diaries in order to discredit him as a closet homosexual, the still unexplained disappearance of the one-time Independent Labour Party MP and suspected Soviet spy Victor Grayson in 1920 (to which an entire chapter is devoted), and the forged Zinoviev Letter of 1924, used to discredit the first Labour government.

Similarly, extensive but often essentially irrelevant details are provided about Gregory's acquaintances and contemporaries and general political developments; an awful lot of the text is basically padding. Combined with the author's prolix style this makes the book an uphill struggle to read. But for anyone wanting to find out what is known about Maundy Gregory, his life and career and involvement with the honours scandal behind the Lloyd George Fund, it is a highly useful source.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

Northern Liberal

Alan Beith, *A View from the North* (Northumbria University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by Michael Meadowcroft

I HAVE AN immense personal regard for Alan Beith and for his long years of service to the cause of Liberalism. Following the miseries of the merger negotiations and vote, I believed that the only chance for the Liberal cause to be safeguarded was for Alan to become the leader of the new party. It needed someone who not only was an instinctive Liberal but who also knew Liberal history and had the intellectual depth, plus the tactical skills, to keep the party relatively sound, despite its social democratic

component. Consequently, in the summer of 1988 I campaigned for him to become leader of the new party. Had he succeeded it would have been impossible to have remained outside the party. That didn't happen, alas, and it has taken a somewhat long and winding road to be back in the same party.

His chapter on Liberal philosophy and beliefs, included deliberately to give positive reasons why Liberals and Liberal Democrats continue to put such time and energy into a cause

which provides so little political return but which is so fundamentally important to the kind of society that is in harmony with human talents and aspirations, is an excellent exposition. Russell Johnston's perorations made the same points in magical language that sent one out to continue the unequal struggle with renewed vigour; Alan Beith chooses to set out the case in measured terms that are equally needed and no less persuasive.

Not least from his decade as Chief Whip Alan knows more than most where the bodies are buried and has been privy to many of the internal party torments. I therefore grabbed his autobiography hot from the press, so to speak, pausing only to check the letter M in the index, in order to delve into the key passages. Alas, most of my hopes that this would be a key work of autobiographical political reference remain unfulfilled. There are certainly some valuable expositions but in most cases Alan remains too polite and skates over important issues. In that sense this is only a partial contribution to Liberal history.

I suspect that Alan himself did not intend it to be primarily a political work. It is much more the story of a personal voyage, illustrated from his political life, written for a wide circle of friends, and, as such it very much succeeds. He writes well and his recounting of the deaths of his wife, Barbara, and then his son, Chris, are movingly done with no mawkish sentiment but with an open heart and a willingness to share on the page feelings which Alan understandably largely kept to himself whilst having to maintain a public presence.

As it happens, whilst I was Alan's deputy whip, I had evidence of the decency of John Major, who was then a government whip, on this matter. Major and I were whipping an environment bill on the floor of the House – report stage, I think – and John approached me: 'I understand that Alan's son is rather ill.' 'That's right,' I responded. 'Well, let us adjourn the House early so that he can go home.' The whole parliamentary

process came to a halt so that a single Member could go home to a sick child. It wouldn't happen often but even one example deserves recognition.

Alan also writes very directly of his Christian beliefs and the simple linking of that faith with his personal tragedies contributes to the whole picture of him as an individual. No one, on any side of politics, could be other than delighted with his recent relationship and marriage to Diana Maddock. He also mentions his musical background – trumpet-playing – and his linguistic skills – Norwegian and Welsh!

There are some tantalising political tidbits. I do not recall seeing before the detail of the Parliamentary Party vote in favour of Jeremy Thorpe resigning the party leadership after the Scott allegations becoming public. Incidentally, Alan is wrong in saying that 'Richard Wainwright made public his insistence that Jeremy should go.' That certainly was the message between the lines of Richard's BBC Radio Leeds interview but his actual statement was that Thorpe must sue for libel or face the implications of not doing.

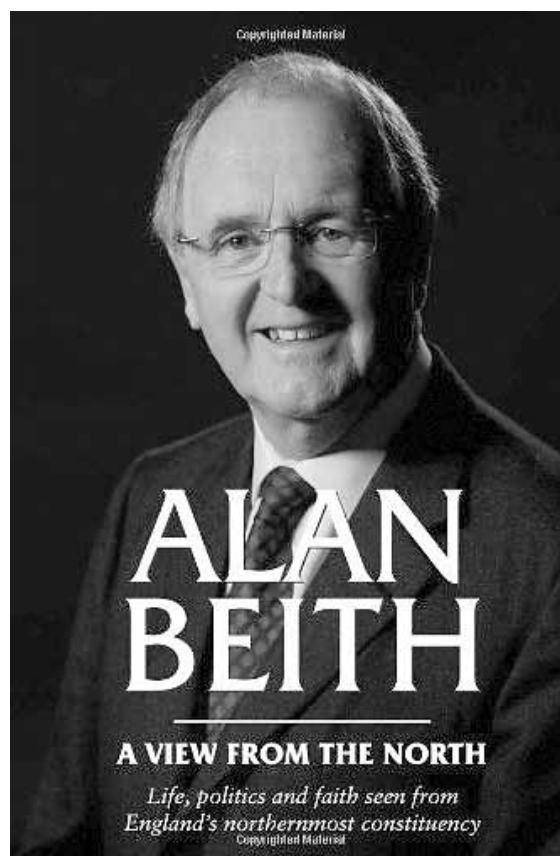
On the Lib-Lab Pact Beith writes that 'with a confidence motion coming up, Callaghan approached the Liberals', whereas the received truth has always been that Cyril Smith made the initial approach to Callaghan and that Cledwyn Hughes followed it up with Steel. Beith makes no comment on the background to David Steel's failure to make Callaghan insist on a whipped Labour vote on proportional representation for the European elections on 1979. Both David Owen and Chris Mayhew believed that Labour's determination to retain power would have made them accept a whipped vote had Steel insisted on it.

Beith's account of the Alliance includes no comment on the background to the Liberal by-election victory in October 1981 at Croydon North West where David Steel's crass attempt to bounce Shirley Williams into the nomination there highlighted his failure to woo Bill Pitt and the Liberal Party into giving way – a course of action that might have

been achieved with the right tactics. He does, however, hint that he was in favour of Steel formally taking over from Jenkins as leader of the Alliance campaign at the Ettrick Bridge meeting in the middle of the 1983 general election campaign.

Beith's account of the facts relating to David Steel's purported 'sabbatical' at the start of the 1983 parliament are, I think, put on the record for the first time. Only a few of us, mainly those of us in the Whips' Office, knew that Steel had formally resigned as leader. Beith states that he still has the resignation letter 'which I retrieved from the Party President, John Griffiths'. I'll bet John kept a photocopy. Amazingly the press never cottoned on to this story – yet another 'what if' occasion.

Commenting on David Penhaligon's tragic death in a car accident just before Christmas 1986, Beith tells of his closeness with Penhaligon and of the eventual problem of how, if at all, they could both compete for the party leadership. I was unaware that the two of them were so close and completely oblivious to the fact that they were both already making their



dispositions on a future leadership contest. It would have been yet another case of the need for a combination of the diverse and very different talents of two key protagonists!

Beith's treatment of the 1986 defence debate at the Liberal Party's Eastbourne Assembly is unsatisfactory. It is a longer story than can be dealt with in a book review and, fortunately, there are two accounts available: mine in *Journal of Liberal History*, No 18, spring 1998 (and on my website <http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/liberal.html> 'Alliance – Parties and Leaders') and in *Radical Quarterly*, No 5, autumn 1987. Suffice to say here that Beith's implication that the political debacle was caused by 'the presence within the Liberal Party of a substantial minority of unilateralist views' is incorrect. The eventual post-Assembly fudge, which I introduced into a Commons debate in December 1986, was almost identical in its essence to a draft Assembly motion put to the Policy Committee in advance by William Wallace and rejected by David Steel who wanted, fatally, to go for the high-wire act.

Beith regards the account of the merger negotiations in Rachael Pitchford's and Tony Greaves' book, *Merger – The Inside Story*, as 'fairly accurate.' By and large Alan Beith's role within the negotiations was as a solid and dependable Liberal colleague, and was an important antidote to Steel's wayward and undependable role, but he fails to mention that at the key moment when John Grant resigned from the SDP team and then Bob Maclennan walked out saying he couldn't go on – to the surprise of his own colleagues, who were forced to follow him rather sheepishly – it was Alan who asked the Liberal team, 'What can we give them to get them back to the table?' It was a moment when the Liberal team could have ensured that there was a formula that would have retained party unity, and it muffed it. Ironically Beith approvingly quotes Willie Goodhart, a key SDP team member, as saying that 'the SDP team's more effective negotiating

His chapter on Liberal philosophy and beliefs, included deliberately to give positive reasons why Liberals and Liberal Democrats continue to put such time and energy into a cause which provides so little political return but which is so fundamentally important to the kind of society that is in harmony with human talents and aspirations, is an excellent exposition.

skill enabled [it] to win battles which it would have been better for [them] to lose'.

Beith's comments on the subsequent leadership contest are interesting: 'There was no way David Steel could win Liberal support to lead the new party ... [H]e had acquired far too much unwelcome baggage in the merger negotiations, and his mishandling over the policy document was the last straw, particularly for many of his parliamentary colleagues' [my italics]. Those of us who had been conscious of similar political weaknesses in our esteemed leader for many years, and who had struggled to keep the party united in the face of much provocation, would have welcomed parliamentary party action much earlier.

He is very loyal to Paddy Ashdown as leader, and recognises his later leadership skills, but makes the accurate comment

that 'he might not have won the leadership under the old system, in which only the MPs had votes'. Alan makes it clear that, as Deputy Leader, he knew of the Ashdown 'project' with Blair and that he was relaxed about it, not least because he 'thought that the coalition was never going to happen'.

All in all, this is a biography worth reading for its humanity and for its occasional political *aperçus*, but it is not for those who expect to find the insider view on the past thirty years of Liberal history.

Michael Meadowcroft joined the Liberal Party in 1958. He has been a full-time party official and a national officer. He was a Leeds City Councillor, a West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Councillor and, from 1983–87, MP for Leeds West. He has written extensively on Liberal philosophy and history.

Eight case studies of notorious political rivals

John Campbell, *Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Year of Political Rivalry, from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown* (Jonathan Cape, 2009)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

JOHN CAMPBELL first made his (indelible) mark as the author of *Lloyd George: the Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–31* (1977), a groundbreaking study of Lloyd George's declining years which has well stood the test of time. Subsequently he has published a masterly, well-received clutch of political biographies, of Lord Birkenhead (1983), Roy Jenkins (1983), Aneurin Bevan (1986), the award-winning study of Ted Heath (1993), and Margaret Thatcher (two volumes, 2000 and 2003). His most recent work, *If Love Were All: the Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (2006) (reviewed in *Journal* 52, autumn 2006), was the ultimate detailed account of Lloyd George's intense relationship with

his mistress of thirty years' standing. As a full-time writer, the author is especially well-placed to produce these magisterial tomes.

For the present book Campbell presents his readership with eight notorious case studies of political rivalry – from Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger in the late eighteenth century to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in very recent years. In this last chapter he comes close to writing the 'instant history' so beloved of many contemporary historians. Whereas in *If Love Were All* the author went to enormous lengths to quarry all the relevant primary source materials, in this book he relies mainly on secondary works. He makes good use of his own biographies and has read