

LETTERS

The 1906 election, and Sir Charles Grey MP

Being surrounded by election statistics, I thought I would take another look at the question (Liberal History Quiz 2008, *Journal of Liberal History* 61), 'In which 20th century election did the Liberal Party achieve its highest share of the vote?' The stated answer of 1906 was correct but the associated 49.0 per cent quoted was slightly inaccurate and perhaps somewhat misleading.

In both my immediate sources to hand, the Liberal share of the vote is given as 49.4 per cent. However, the significance of plural voting (business and universities) should be appreciated, as also should the fact that 114 MPs (17 per cent) were returned unopposed (13 Conservatives, etc., 27 Liberals, 73 Irish Nationalists and 1 other) and that, by reason of the Gladstone–MacDonald pact, 24 of the Labour MPs elected in England had only Conservative, etc. opposition.

Thus and otherwise, the Liberal vote of 49.4 per cent represented the vote for 509 candidates (with an average vote of 5,404) whereas the Conservative, etc. vote of 43.4 per cent represented the vote for 543 candidates (with an average vote of 4,461). Accordingly, the real Liberal/Conservative, etc. votes ratio was about 100:83 rather than about 100:88, as from the basic percentages. If statistical account could be taken of all that and all other factors, the Liberal share of the 1906 vote, perhaps in the UK and certainly in Great Britain, could be adjusted to over 50 per cent.

On another tack, in the context of writing biographical and family notes on all the Liberal Cabinet Ministers from 1859 to 1932, can anyone advise if George Charles Grey – Liberal MP for Berwick-on-Tweed from an uncontested

by-election in August 1941 until he was killed in action on 30 July 1944 – was related to Sir Edward Grey, Liberal Foreign Secretary in 1905–16 and Liberal MP for Berwick-on-Tweed from the 1885 general election until he was created Viscount Grey in 1916?

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Margaret Wintringham

Journal of Liberal History 36 (autumn 2002) carries a biography of Margaret Wintringham, the Liberal MP from the 1920s, written by Larry Iles and Robert Ingham. They state that: 'She was not asked to contest the 1937 by-election for the seat (Aylesbury), nor did she pursue an initial interest in contesting the Gainsborough constituency', before going on to conclude that: 'The Liberal Party lost one of its biggest assets by marginalising Wintringham from the 1930s until her death'.

Both these points under-value the worth placed in her by the party. She did more than pursue an initial interest in Gainsborough – she was in fact prospective candidate for the seat in 1939. A general election was anticipated that year and Gainsborough was one of the party's best prospects for a gain.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the Labour Party did not have a candidate in place, as they had done in 1935. In 1939, there was much speculation (nurtured by the Popular Front proposals) that Labour candidates might not appear in seats where the Liberals were well placed to defeat sitting Conservatives. It is not hard to imagine that

in 1939 Wintringham might have overturned a Conservative majority of less than 2,000 with over 4,000 Labour voters looking for a new home.

(Sourced from: *Liberal Magazine* 1938 and 1939 for Wintringham's Gainsborough activity; *Labour Party National Annual Report 1939* for confirmation of no Labour candidate in Gainsborough.)

Graem Peters

Albert McElroy

In my article about the use of the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, which appeared in *Journal of Liberal History* 65 (winter 2009–10), I stated incorrectly that the Ulster Liberal Party had two MPs elected to the Parliament of Northern Ireland. In fact there was only one, Sheelagh Murnaghan, who served as MP for Queen's University, Belfast from 1961 to 1969.

Albert McElroy was never elected to Stormont. He was a Glasgow-born Minister of the Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church who had previously supported the Northern Ireland Labour Party and a breakaway group, the Commonwealth Labour Party. In 1956 he resurrected

the Ulster Liberal Party (ULP) for its last phase. The ULP had previously existed from time to time in the province from 1886, when Gladstone's espousal of home rule destroyed the Irish Liberals. Support from the British Liberal Party revived it briefly in 1906–14 and again in 1929. After 1970 it lost support to the newly formed Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and was finally wound up by 1987. My thanks go to Dr Sandy Waugh for bringing this mistake to my attention.

Readers can find out more about McElroy by accessing *Journal* 33 (Winter 2001) which is available to download free from the History Group website at http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=10&item=journal This contains an article by Berkely Farr, 'Liberalism and Unionist Northern Ireland', which tells the story of the ULP and the role played by the remarkable Albert McElroy. *Journal* 33 also has an article by Denis Loretto on the formation of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland which contains a critique of the ULP approach, also well worth revisiting.

Graham Lippiatt

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