

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

SPRING 2012

Orpington celebrated

LIBERAL LEGEND Eric Lubbock celebrated the 50th anniversary of his Orpington by-election winner with a star-studded dinner at the National Liberal Club last month, writes **York Membery**.

A host of big names past and present attended the fifth Orpington Circle Dinner, chaired by Paul Hunt, to pay tribute to the still-sprightly octogenarian and to talk about the campaign and its significance.

Former Liberal MP Michael Meadowcroft, who campaigned alongside Eric at Orpington in March 1962, told the hundred plus guests at the banquet: 'This was a by-election where the Tories got it all wrong – and we not only got it right, but did "disgustingly well", to quote Jo Grimond.'

'Like everyone working at party HQ at the time, I was sent to Orpington to help out in the campaign,' recalled Meadowcroft. 'The original Liberal candidate, Jack Galloway – a man who had a personal defect that he shared with Lloyd George – had been replaced at the eleventh hour by Councillor Eric Lubbock, a sound local squire and a figure of great moral rectitude.'

The seat had been left vacant for five months and in Peter Goldman the Tories clearly chose the wrong man to fight it. 'He'd park his caravan in a street. The Tories would announce that "Peter Goldman is here" and urge anyone who wanted to meet him to visit him in his caravan,' said Meadowcroft. 'I don't think he knocked on one door.'

The day before the by-election, Liberal campaign manager Pratap Chitnis (now Lord Chitnis) got wind of the fact that a new opinion poll in the *Daily Mail* showed the party closing on the Tories in the seat. He 'somehow got hold of 5,000 copies of the paper which we handed out to commuters on the day of the by-election,' added Meadowcroft. The by-election duly saw Eric sensationally win the

seat with a near 22 per cent swing, giving him a near 8,000 majority. He went on to hold it until 1970.

Another veteran of the campaign, William Wallace (now Lord Wallace of Saltaire), explained how the Orpington by-election was 'a world away from today's world'.

'We did most of our canvassing in the afternoon back then, and there was nearly always someone at home,' he said, noting that many of those who eventually voted for the Liberals were the sons or daughters of Nonconformists. 'What's more, people were keen to discuss politics.'

After a letter of congratulation from the party leader Nick Clegg, thanking Eric for his 'astounding contribution as an MP, chief whip and peer' was read out, Eric, who now sits in the Upper Chamber as Lord Avebury, got up to say a few words himself. The 83-year-old modestly attributed much of the Liberal success at the by-election to Chitnis, 'who ran the campaign

very effectively', and his 'fantastic team' who 'made a big difference'.

While Meadowcroft rightly observed that Orpington did not 'herald a great change in politics' at the time, the final speaker of the night, party president Tim Farron, who wasn't even born when it took place, argued that it had greater long-term significance than is sometimes appreciated.

'The Orpington by-election rightly occupies an important place in Liberal mythology,' he said. 'It was a David versus Goliath struggle. Up until Orpington, the party's success had depended upon a handful of people who refused to accept that "the game was up", the conventional wisdom of the day – but afterwards things were never quite the same again.'

He added, to applause: 'The simple truth is that without Orpington there would have been no Bermondsey, Christchurch or Ribble Valley. In short, the long march back to power began at Orpington.'

Eric Lubbock, Lord Avebury (front row, centre), with Orpington by-election veterans (photo Michael O'Sullivan; www.michaelosullivan.co.uk)



Even before this dinner, the Orpington Circle had raised £25,000 for the Liberal Democrat by-election fund.

Now hear what leading Liberal Democrats really thought – by Adrian Slade

SINCE 2004 the *Journal of Liberal History* has been the guardian of what, although I say it myself, is now becoming a uniquely interesting party archive – a set of CDs and audio-cassette tapes of in-depth interviews I have conducted with leading Liberal Democrats of the last decade. The collection spans the years 2002–11 and each interview is now available for listening from the *Journal* archive.

The collection includes the very last media interview given by Roy Jenkins, the very first UK interview given by Paddy Ashdown after his return from four years in Bosnia, interviews with the Federal Party Presidents and Welsh and Scottish leaders and London Mayoral candidates of the past ten years and, most recently, interviews with Nick Clegg and all the Liberal Democrat Secretaries or Ministers of State in the Coalition Government. I have also retained separately from this archive taped interviews with all the new Liberal Democrat MPs of the 2005 and 2010 intakes.

In the summer of 2002 when, for my own interest, I interviewed former Liberal leadership contender John Pardoe, I never thought that this would become the first in a nine-year series of similar talks with other significant Liberal Democrats. Before 2002 the party had had no spoken record of how its leading members viewed their political past, their earlier party experiences, the more dramatic events that shaped their political lives or their current views of the party and its prospects.

All my write-ups of these interviews have subsequently been published in the *Journal* or *Liberal Democrat News* but inevitably they are in abbreviated form. Only the *Journal* archive has the full, unexpurgated,

Audio recordings available

2002–06 CDs and tapes

In approximate chronological order, the following interviews have now been transferred to **CD** (some singly, some in pairs according to length):

John Pardoe, Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins, David Steel, Bill Rodgers, Jim Wallace, Mike German, Simon Hughes, Tim Razzall and Chris Rennard, Ludovic Kennedy (2002) and Grigory Yavlinsky (2006), Charles Kennedy (2004) and Paddy Ashdown (2006)

The following are still available on **audio-cassette**:

John Lee, Eric Avebury (Lubbock), Paul Marsden (2002), Mike Storey and Sir Trevor Jones, Barry Norman (2003), Tony Greaves, Tom McNally and Charles Kennedy (2003).

2006–11 CDs

Menzies Campbell and Nick Clegg (2008/9), Tavish Scott and Kirsty Williams (2008), Brian Paddick, Ros Scott and Lembit Opik (2008), Susan Kramer and Tim Farron (2010);

QUESTIONS OF STATE series: Michael Moore and Danny Alexander, Vince Cable and Chris Huhne, Steve Webb and Sarah Teather, Nick Harvey and Tom McNally, Paul Burstow and Jeremy Browne (2011); Nick Clegg (2010 and 2011), Willie Rennie and Brian Paddick (2011).

recorded versions. The list features all the most familiar Liberal Democrat names in today's party, but there is also an interview with one significant name from the past, Ludovic Kennedy, and a 2006 interview with a beleaguered Russian Liberal, Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of Yablokov, the Russian Democratic Party., who addressed the Lib Dem conference in September 2006.

Now many of the original earlier recordings have been transferred from tape to CD

and the archive has been substantially expanded, exclusively on CD, to include more interviews conducted between 2006 and 2011. Readers of the *Journal* or any others interested can, for example, now listen on CD to any or all of the recordings of my 2011 interviews with a the Liberal Democrat Secretaries and Ministers of State in the Coalition or my three full-length interviews with Nick Clegg in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

For a unique insight into the thoughts and motivations

of all those above, enthusiasts for Liberal/Liberal Democrat History may now borrow these CDs and tapes from the *Journal*, to copy and listen to at home (*subject to certain conditions*) for a token fee of £5 per CD or £3 per tape. If you are interested, ask Mark Pack (mark.pack@gmail.com) for a copy of the full interview list, summary content details, conditions of use and application form or, if you are certain what you want to hear, just return the form below.

To: Mark Pack, *Journal of Liberal History* archive, 2a Heathville Road, London N19 3AJ

I am interested in listening to

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I enclose a cheque for £ (£5 per CD, £3 per tape) payable to Liberal Democrat History Group.

I will abide by the conditions that I will receive prohibiting any public use of the recordings without special permission. and I undertake to return the original cassette(s) within two weeks of this request.

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