

# RE-ESTABLISH LIBERALISM IN DUMFRIES

With the return of the Liberal Democrats to government in 2010 the focus of the party's historiography, for long obsessed with the causes and course of Liberal decline in the first decades of the twentieth

century, will inevitably shift to the origins and progress of the recovery that became an increasingly conspicuous characteristic of the years that followed. In this latter story, the re-establishment of a

Liberal infrastructure at constituency level played a vital and so far largely neglected part.<sup>1</sup> **David Dutton** looks at the efforts Liberal supporters made to re-establish the party in Dumfriesshire.

Dumfries High Street in the 1940s



# ING THE FAITH FRIESSHIRE, 1931–63

**I**N MANY CASES this process of recovery meant creating a Liberal presence after many years, sometimes decades, of absence. It involved far more than simply nominating a candidate to stand in the constituency, as the general elections of 1945 and 1950 revealed only too clearly. At these two contests literally hundreds of well-meaning Liberal nominees sallied forth to inevitable annihilation at the polls, bereft of even the most basic administrative and organisational support. The result was record numbers of lost deposits, 64 in 1945 and as many as 319 in 1950. Rebuilding a Liberal presence usually involved many years of hard work on the ground by a small number of dedicated (and often illogically optimistic) activists, rather than a few weeks of enthusiastic but ill-focused activity during a general election campaign. As has recently been written, 'The Liberal Party's traditional vote would not have enabled the Party to survive the dark years ... if it had not been mobilised at election times, at least in some constituencies. The Liberal Party could not have been used as an effective vehicle for protest if it did not exist in the constituencies. The Liberal leadership would have been entirely ineffective if there had been no Liberal Party in the country to lead.'<sup>2</sup> The experience of the constituency of Dumfriesshire in south-west Scotland provides an interesting case study.

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Dumfriesshire was a county of strong Liberal traditions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Among its celebrated MPs were Robert Reid (MP for Dumfries Burghs 1886–1905) who, as Lord Loreburn, served as Lord Chancellor under Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, 1905–12; his successor, John Gulland (MP for Dumfries Burghs 1906–18) who was government Chief Whip 1915–16; and Percy Molteno (MP for Dumfriesshire 1906–18), radical plutocrat and prominent opponent of British involvement in the First World War. The two constituencies were amalgamated in 1918.<sup>3</sup>

There were few signs of Liberal decline in Scotland before the coming of European war in 1914. After the end of that conflict, however, decline was marked and in many places turned rapidly into disintegration. Fifty-eight Liberal MPs were elected in Scotland in December 1910; only eight in 1924. By the time of the 1945 general election there was no Liberal parliamentary representation north of the border. As was the case in many rural areas, Dumfriesshire in the 1920s turned into a Conservative (Unionist)–Liberal marginal, but the Liberal Party was clearly still a force to be reckoned with in the constituency, its candidates emerging victorious from the general elections of 1922, 1923 and 1929. The party's successful candidate in the last of these contests was Joseph Hunter, a well-known and popular local

figure, who had for twenty years been Medical Officer of Health for Dumfries. But in practice, if not in name, this was to be Liberalism's last success in the constituency.

If the slow and painful recovery of Liberalism in Dumfriesshire – at least to the point where it again had an institutional presence in the constituency – is to be understood, a word must first be said about the nature of its predicament which began in the early 1930s. In addition to the problems besetting the party more generally in Scotland, and Britain as a whole, three key factors were involved. In the first place, the sitting Liberal MP defected to the Liberal Nationals, although delaying the announcement of his decision until 1934.<sup>4</sup> Then the MP succeeded in taking with him the local Liberal association, a body which managed for many years to confuse the situation surrounding its true allegiance. Finally, the leading local newspaper, the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser*, contrived to add to this confusion by its insistence, maintained into the 1950s, that the constituency's Liberal National representation was in fact genuinely Liberal in the best traditions of Gladstone, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith.

With the formation of the National Government in August 1931, to which the whole Liberal Party at first adhered, it was Hunter who was allowed to carry the government's colours, without Conservative opposition, when a

further general election was called in October. But illness prevented Hunter playing any part in the campaign and meant that he was not subjected, as were Liberal candidates up and down the country, to detailed interrogation as to his attitude towards the government. Was he, like the supporters of Sir John Simon, ready to give full backing to the government in whatever steps it judged necessary to deal with the country's balance of payments deficit? Or did he, in line with the supporters of Sir Herbert Samuel, reserve his position if such measures included the imposition of protective tariffs? The evidence, such as it was, pointed in different directions. His written words offered little guidance. 'I wish to serve no party interest, but to help in maintaining a stable and strong Government pledged to keep a balanced Budget, to maintain and improve our national credit, to restore our balance of trade and to combine a full and free life for the people of this country with the security and integrity of the constitution.'<sup>5</sup> Such a statement could have been made by just about any Liberal or Liberal National candidate at the election. On the issue of free trade Hunter was conspicuously silent, although officials of the Dumfriesshire Unionist Association claimed that, although not a 'hundred per cent tariff man', he had given an assurance that he would follow the Prime Minister and the National Government in 'any proposition they think necessary to recommend for the national welfare'.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Hunter had given no indication of a conversion to the Simonite camp and, according to the *Standard*, remained a committed Samuelite, 'prepared to consider tariff proposals without committing [himself] to their advocacy'.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation seemed to be confirmed when, on the eve of the poll, Samuel himself sent a telegram of good wishes for Hunter's electoral success.<sup>8</sup>

After securing victory over his Labour opponent with a majority of over 19,000, Hunter's precise party political position remained obscure. His health was still frail, he did not visit his constituency until the end of April 1932 and he made no immediate public pronouncements, partly because of his health and partly, it was later

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reported, because his illness had robbed him of the self-confidence needed for public speaking.<sup>9</sup> But at least the ailing MP was able to attend the meeting of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, from which most Simonites had absented themselves, at which Samuel was chosen to succeed Lloyd George as party leader, and he was present at dinner that evening in the company of Samuel, Donald Maclean and other leading figures of the mainstream party. Alarm bells should have begun to ring when, at the beginning of 1932, Hunter voted with the government and against the overwhelming majority of those listed as Samuelites over the Import Duties Bill. But the *Standard* played down any political significance of this move. Hunter's action merely reflected credit upon him for maintaining his promise to support the government in the measures it deemed necessary: 'The votes which Dr Hunter gave in support of the Import Duties Bill are to be interpreted as the fulfilment of his pledges, and not an expression of his political faith'.<sup>10</sup> The MP, it suggested, would probably cooperate with the Samuelites 'now that tariffs are off the carpet'.<sup>11</sup> At all events, his constituents could rest assured as to the 'soundness of Dr Hunter's political faith. He is a Liberal dyed in the wool, one whose whole outlook on social and political affairs is characterised by that breadth of view and love of liberty and warm humanitarianism that we associate with the name of Liberalism.'<sup>12</sup> The Ottawa Agreements, setting up a system of Imperial Preference, prompted the resignations of Samuel and his colleagues from their ministerial posts in September 1932, but the fact that the ex-ministers chose for the time being to stay on the government's side of the House avoided the need for Hunter to clarify his own position. Even when, just over a year later, the MP failed to accompany Samuel and his colleagues in crossing the floor of the Commons and taking their places on the opposition benches, the *Standard* did not interpret this as evidence of his conversion to the Liberal National cause. Rather it stressed the independence of the Dumfries MP who was 'not counted either among the followers of Sir Herbert Samuel or of Sir John Simon'.<sup>13</sup>

With Hunter continuing to play a muted role in both Westminster and local politics, rumours began to spread that he was contemplating resignation. Speculation intensified when he bought a house in the constituency with a view to resuming his medical career in the area. The Dumfriesshire Liberal Association even approached Sir Henry Fildes, former Coalition Liberal MP for Stockport, with a view to ascertaining his availability in the event of a vacancy. Confident denials of Hunter's imminent departure appeared in the *Standard*, but the newspaper gave no indication of what lay behind the MP's continuing inactivity. Finally, in May 1934, it was reported that Hunter had decided to remain in parliament and that, not only was he joining the Liberal National group, but that he had accepted an important position as head of that party's national organisation.<sup>14</sup>

The key factor, of course, was the reaction of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association before whose General Committee Hunter appeared on 23 May to make a full statement regarding his position in parliament and his intentions for the future. Hunter pointed out that there were now four groups of Liberals in the House of Commons – the small band of MPs gathered around Lloyd George who, since the election, had consistently opposed the National Government; the Samuelites, who had begun by supporting that government but who had now withdrawn their support; the Liberal National group who accepted the leadership of Sir John Simon; and the tiny band of erstwhile Samuelites, including himself, who had declined to follow Samuel into the ranks of opposition. Hunter explained his own position in terms of the pledges he had given at the time of the general election and his ongoing belief in the need for an all-party government. He 'gave an assurance to the meeting that in the work he was about to undertake he would maintain the friendliest relations with all Liberals'. After his address Hunter answered a number of questions and then withdrew to allow members of the committee to deliberate. 'At the end it was decided that the committee should acquiesce in the step that Dr Hunter was about to take.' With this conclusion the

Dumfriesshire Liberal Association became in effect, albeit without seeing any need to change its name, the Dumfriesshire Liberal National Association.<sup>15</sup> For all but the most alert, however, the precise situation remained obscure. Not until September 1949 did the Association even transfer its affiliation to the Scottish National Liberal Organisation.<sup>16</sup> Yet the change of allegiance in 1934 was crucial. Like many Liberal Associations across the country, that in Dumfriesshire was already dwindling in terms of organisation and activity. Heavily focused on the town of Dumfries itself, a few key officials were well placed to determine its orientation. At a time, moreover, when local elections in the constituency were not generally contested on party lines, the Association's decision on whom it would support in general elections was all-important.

It was always possible that the decision to back Hunter was no more than a temporary accommodation, a reflection of the MP's strong personal base and local popularity, and a determination to retain his services, rather than a conscious change of allegiance on the part of the local party organisation. Hunter himself insisted that his Liberalism remained unchanged and undiluted. 'It was all nonsense', he told an audience in Dumfries in September, 'to say that a man ceased to be a Liberal because he associated in cooperative endeavour with other people whose principles in the past had been different.'<sup>17</sup> But events soon put this interpretation of the situation to the test. Hunter died suddenly in July 1935. The Scottish whips of the Liberal National and Unionist Parties held preliminary talks immediately after Hunter's funeral and within days a meeting of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association had been called at which a committee was appointed to meet the local Unionist Association with a view to the selection of an agreed candidate for the by-election.<sup>18</sup>

Having already made provisional arrangements a year earlier in anticipation of Hunter's imminent retirement, the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association was well placed to seize the initiative. Henry Fildes arrived in Dumfries on 6 August and attended meetings with local Liberals and Conservatives the

following day. 'Afterwards the representatives of both parties met together and there was agreement that Sir Henry Fildes would be a fit and proper person to stand as candidate in support of the National Government.'<sup>19</sup> Fildes was duly adopted and then defeated his Labour opponent in the by-election in September, repeating the performance in the general election two months later.

At least in the national press Fildes was accurately identified as a Liberal National candidate and then MP.<sup>20</sup> This, however, was something which the *Dumfries Standard* studiously avoided doing. Yet it was difficult to question the newspaper's impeccably Liberal credentials. From its foundation in 1843 the *Standard* had pursued a consistently radical line, for example opposing British involvement in the Boer War of 1899–1902. At its centenary during the Second World War messages of congratulation were received from the Liberal leader, Archibald Sinclair, and the by then aged Lloyd George.<sup>21</sup> It was a tradition that at general elections successful Liberal candidates would address their supporters following the declaration of the poll from the first-floor window of the *Standard's* offices overlooking Queensberry Square in the centre of Dumfries. Yet during the 1930s and beyond, the Liberalism which the *Standard* supported was the Liberalism of Hunter, Fildes and the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association, in other words Liberal Nationalism. The key factor – though not one which the newspaper seemed keen to proclaim<sup>22</sup> – was that James Reid, who had edited the *Standard* since 1919, was also chairman of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association.

The newspaper followed a subtle path. While its conversion to Liberal Nationalism was not explicitly announced, this could be discerned by its more perceptive readers. From the outset, the *Standard* offered consistent support for the National Government. While the 'permanence of Liberalism' was 'hardly in doubt', the time had come for the Liberal Party to make its choice:

What is now and has been for a dozen years in doubt is the capacity of the Liberal party to be a strong and effective bulwark

against the revolutionary tendencies of Socialism on the one side and the reactionary activities of Toryism on the other. A party that has to fight on two fronts is always in a position of weakness.<sup>23</sup>

The newspaper did its best to keep Samuel and his followers inside the government's ranks. 'It would be a disaster to call Sir Herbert Samuel away from making his contribution to the settlement of national problems in order that he might lead a party offensive.'<sup>24</sup> The abandonment of free trade was regrettable, but the condition of the country, with over two million unemployed, had 'compelled reconsideration of old tenets'. An experiment was being tried out with tariffs 'and Liberals are well advised to await the result'.<sup>25</sup> When Samuel did resign from the government and, a year later, rejoin the opposition benches, the *Standard* stressed the illogicality of his actions:

He remained in office after tariffs had been introduced, and only left after the Ottawa agreement was brought forward. Even then he did not deem it necessary to signify his separation by crossing the floor of the House. Now he has gone on no issue at all, he can hardly blame those who feel it a duty to their country to support the government a little longer.<sup>26</sup>

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The Samuelite withdrawal made the continuing presence of those Liberals who remained within the administration all the more important. 'The greatest amount of Liberalism would be obtained from a Liberal Government', but, as there was no immediate hope of achieving this, the next best thing was to support a government that had 'a considerable leaven of Liberals'.<sup>27</sup> It was just a pity that 'official Liberalism should continue to pursue a barren and unfruitful policy of political exclusiveness'.<sup>28</sup> The *Standard* thus spoke the language of Liberal Nationalism, even if the newspaper dared not speak its name. Above all, the *Standard* lost no opportunity to stress that Hunter, and then Fildes, were no less Liberals for their support of the National Government. Of course, there must have been readers who

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understood that the newspaper's presentation of events distorted the reality of Liberal politics. But when, in the pages of a single issue, the *Standard* reported that the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association had nominated Fildes to fight the general election of 1935, while the Galloway Liberal Association had decided not to field a candidate in the adjoining constituency, the average voter in south-west Scotland could have been forgiven for assuming that it was referring to one and the same party.<sup>29</sup>

How did orthodox Liberalism in Dumfriesshire react to this very successful three-pronged take-over by the Liberal Nationals? Before the 1935 general election there were few if any signs of a counter-attack being launched. In the absence of a genuinely Liberal candidate in the by-election following Hunter's death, one correspondent to the *Standard*, D. S. Macdonald, suggested that those Liberals who were dissatisfied with the National Government, but who did not support the policies of the Labour Party, could make a 'very effective protest' by abstaining at the polls.<sup>30</sup> With the result declared, Macdonald renewed his attack. Noting that Fildes's vote at the by-election, when he was supported by both the Conservative and Liberal Associations, was virtually unchanged from that secured by Hunter, standing as a Liberal in 1929, Macdonald concluded that the by-election result 'clearly demonstrates that in deciding to adopt a National candidate the Liberal Association have misinterpreted the wishes of the majority of the Liberal electors in the Division'. He hoped the Association would now decide 'to get back to the Liberal path without delay'.<sup>31</sup> But the *Standard's* editor would not accept such logic. Though Reid did not propose to 'follow him in his arithmetic', it was clear that Macdonald was writing 'nonsense and ought to know it'. Granted that Macdonald had previously urged Liberals to abstain, he could not now complain if some of them had done so. Furthermore, he should recognise that those 'Liberals' who had remained within the National Government had 'just as good a right to represent Liberalism as Sir Herbert Samuel'.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, Macdonald insisted that the Liberal National

ministers 'were difficult to distinguish ... from their Conservative colleagues'.<sup>33</sup>

Only after the general election were there any signs in the constituency of the regeneration of institutional Liberalism. The revival was based on the branch of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association in the small market town of Langholm (population *circa* 2,000). June 1936 saw a gathering of around 250 Liberals in the grounds of Arkleton, home of Captain Walter Scott Elliot, himself a recently elected vice-president of the county association. Scott Elliot announced that those present were 'highly critical' of the National Government and determined to make a protest 'against Dumfriesshire being in the hands of the so-called National Liberals'.<sup>34</sup> Recent events such as the Hoare-Laval fiasco and the failure to impose adequate sanctions on Italy had convinced them that the government had 'finally turned its back on Liberal principles'.<sup>35</sup> This mirrored developments on the national plane. Liberals believed that the actions of the National Government showed that, in proclaiming its adherence to the principles of the League of Nations, it had gone to the country in 1935 under a false prospectus. After 1936, with some organisational strengthening resulting from the implementation of the Meston Report, the party acquired a renewed sense of purpose, even if this was still to be translated into electoral success. Significantly, the guest speaker at Arkleton was Wilfrid Roberts, the mainstream but left-leaning Liberal MP for North Cumberland.<sup>36</sup> The *Standard* was suitably dismissive of the Captain's activities. The Liberals of Langholm had no doubt had a 'pleasant Saturday afternoon', but those who opposed the actions of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association should do so 'in the first instance at least at a meeting of the association'.<sup>37</sup> Scott Elliot 'did not get the name quite right', speaking of National Liberals rather than Liberal Nationals, but in any case his 'purely partisan attitude' was not helpful to the restoration of the Liberal Party to the position it 'once occupied in the affairs of the nation'.<sup>38</sup> When the Langholm branch cut its links with the county association and sought direct affiliation with the Scottish

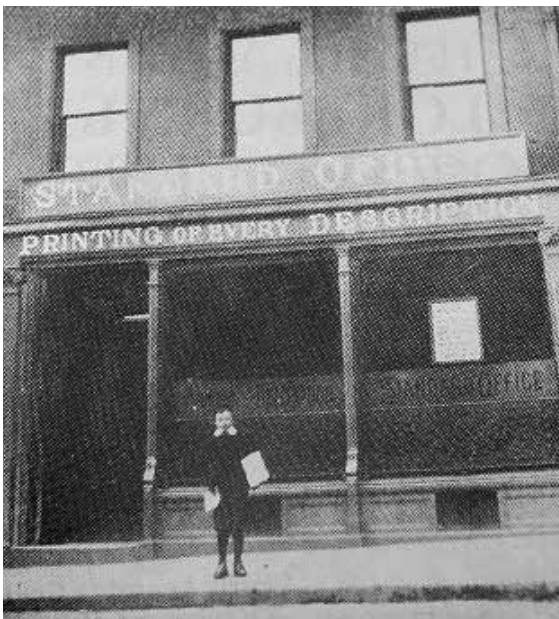
Liberal Federation, the *Standard* criticised the branch committee for taking this 'somewhat autocratic step' without consulting its membership and pointed out that only full constituency associations were eligible to affiliate to the national federation.<sup>39</sup>

In his claim that 'National Liberalism is sheer humbug ... National Liberals are Tories in disguise', Scott Elliot voiced the point of view of orthodox Liberalism which had hitherto been largely concealed from the readers of the *Standard*.<sup>40</sup> But much of the impetus went out of the Langholm initiative as a result of Scott Elliot's own increasingly erratic political course. Beginning with his appearance on Labour platforms to champion the cause of a 'popular front' against the National Government, he moved increasingly to the left and was finally adopted as Labour Party candidate for Accrington in Lancashire at the beginning of 1938.<sup>41</sup> The example of Langholm was at least taken up in the neighbouring constituency of Galloway where local Liberals, having failed to contest the 1935 general election, began to regroup early in 1939. 'To those of us who have the temerity to call ourselves Liberals', wrote D. S. Macdonald, 'yes, just plain Liberal, not Simonite or Liberal National', a meeting in Maxwelltown in February was 'the healthiest bit of political news in south-west Scotland for some considerable time'.<sup>42</sup> The annual meeting of the Scottish Liberal Federation, scheduled to be held in Dumfries in the autumn, might have helped galvanise these developments but it, like so much else, fell victim to the outbreak of European war in September.

When, almost six years later, peace returned, Langholm Liberals were again at the forefront of attempts to re-establish Liberalism in Dumfriesshire. The 1945 general election, sandwiched between the defeat of Germany and that of Japan, took place in a very different political environment from that which had prevailed throughout the 1930s. For the first time since the fragmentation of the Liberal Party at the start of that decade, Liberals and Liberal Nationals opposed one another in a number of constituencies up and down the country, and it was impossible now to claim that they were simply two

From top:  
Dr Joseph Hunter  
MP  
Major Niall  
Macpherson MP  
Dumfries  
*Standard* offices





wings of the same party. When Fildes withdrew from the contest at short notice, local Liberal Nationals (still, it has to be said, masquerading under the name of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association) selected Major Niall Macpherson.<sup>43</sup> The new candidate arrived with an impeccably Liberal pedigree – both his father and uncle had been prominent in Liberal politics – but he stood now as a Liberal National with Conservative support. The *Standard* reacted angrily when it was reported that the Langholm branch had adopted Flying Officer Ian McColl as prospective Liberal candidate for the constituency. Representative of only one fortieth of the whole electorate, ‘the audacity, not to say effrontery, of the Langholm Liberal Association is amazing’. Continuing to distort the reality of Liberal politics in the division, the *Standard* argued that it was for the constituency Liberal Association to select the candidate. ‘One parish association cannot be allowed to dictate to a constituency.’<sup>44</sup> McColl, insisting that the invitation to stand had come from ‘many good Liberals in all parts of Dumfriesshire’, duly entered the contest.<sup>45</sup> But ‘almost without Liberal organisation of any kind’, his cause was a forlorn one.<sup>46</sup> McColl secured under 6,000 votes, 16.9 per cent of the total. Meanwhile, Macpherson, insisting that the Liberal National Party would ‘influence the policy of the Conservative Party in the direction of Liberalism’, was elected with a comfortable majority of 4,077 votes over his Labour opponent.<sup>47</sup>

McColl claimed that, as a result of his candidature, Liberalism had ‘saved its soul in Dumfriesshire’.<sup>48</sup> Objectively, however, his poor performance probably set back his party’s cause in the constituency. Whatever the idea of Dumfriesshire being a ‘natural’ Liberal constituency may have meant, it was clear that this did not translate into the easy recapture of the parliamentary seat by mainstream Liberalism. Indeed, the local branch association in Langholm was moribund by 1946. No Liberal stood in either of the general elections of 1950 or 1951 even though, in the former year, Liberals nationally went forward on a broad front, fielding as many as 475 candidates. Macpherson,

standing now, following the Woolton–Teviot Agreement of 1947, as a National-Liberal-Unionist, was able to consolidate his hold over the constituency. The general election of 1951 is often identified as the nadir of the Liberal Party’s fortunes. Reduced to just six MPs in the House of Commons, it was probably only local electoral pacts and informal understandings with the Conservatives that kept the party in being as a national political movement. Had Clement Davies accepted Churchill’s offer of a ministerial post in the wake of the general election, organised Liberalism could have disintegrated altogether. Paradoxically, however, the early 1950s also saw the first tentative signs of revival. This was true both nationally and in Dumfriesshire.

In March 1954 the octogenarian James Reid, who had retired from the chairmanship of the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association in 1947, finally stepped down from the editor’s chair at the *Dumfries Standard*. After more than thirty years at the helm, Reid suggested in his farewell editorial column that ‘in all the election contests of these years the *Standard* took a vigorous part and was an important factor in the victories at the polls’. This was true enough. But his next statement was more questionable. ‘On no occasion could the candidates whom we opposed accuse us of unfairness.’<sup>49</sup> Reid was succeeded by A. G. Williamson, a committed Liberal. The effect of the change on the tone of the newspaper’s editorials and its coverage of local and national politics was soon apparent. The efforts of the tiny Parliamentary Liberal Party, recently ridiculed and dismissed as of no importance, were now warmly applauded. A party statement on education was received with enthusiasm. ‘It is to be regretted’, wrote the editor, ‘that the Liberals are not in a position to put their new deal for the schools into operation.’ But that was not the fault of ‘the faithful few who represent them at Westminster’. Rather it was the responsibility of ‘those who made them a minority by mixing Liberalism with some of the other “isms” with which we are familiar today’.<sup>50</sup> The party’s line on the European Defence Community crisis in the autumn was equally praiseworthy. It was tragic that, at a time when

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a Liberal government was 'never more needed in the country', the party should find itself in a minority. Again, however, this was not because the principles for which it stood no longer appealed to the electorate, but because 'so many who should be upholding them have let them down by trying to mix Liberalism with other political creeds'.<sup>51</sup> No clearer repudiation could have been asked for, not only of the National Liberal stance, but also of the editorial policy pursued by the newspaper since the early 1930s.

The *Standard's* readers responded enthusiastically to this change. The paper received 'a large number of letters' applauding the 'sound Liberal line' taken in recent months. As one correspondent put it:

As one who remembers the tremendous influence the *Standard* exercised on behalf of Liberalism locally in days gone by, I am overjoyed at the change which has come over the paper. I look forward to reading your forthright editorials with which I find myself in complete agreement. Do please carry on the good work.<sup>52</sup>

By the end of the year the Liberals of Langholm had decided to reactivate their branch association:

The inability or unwillingness of the Dumfries Liberal Party to break loose from their Unionist entanglements and give a genuine Liberal lead to the county was deplored, as it was felt that the county town should naturally be the centre of organisations of any kind affecting the interests of the county. Nevertheless, it was generally felt that Liberals everywhere had a duty to organise, and the meeting resolved to work for the establishment of a flourishing Liberal Association in Langholm in the hope that their example might commend itself to people of like mind throughout the county, and lead in time to the establishment of similar live organisations in all towns and villages.

Only then, it was stressed, would it be time to adopt a candidate to win back 'this traditionally Liberal seat to its old tradition'.<sup>53</sup>

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Commenting on these developments, Williamson addressed head-on earlier criticisms of Langholm's independence of mind. There had been in the past, he conceded, some resentment that a small town should presume to place itself at the head of a county organisation. But it was not from choice that this position had been assumed and it was the hope of Langholm Liberals that someone might be found in Dumfries who would be willing to form a truly Liberal Association to which they would give their support. 'The renewed interest in Liberalism is one of the most promising features of British political life today, and Dumfries, which has always been a Liberal stronghold, could give a lead not only to the county but to the whole country.'<sup>54</sup>

One of the first concrete pieces of evidence of that wider revival came a few days later when the result was declared of the parliamentary by-election in Inverness. In a seat which they had not even contested in 1951, the Liberals secured 36 per cent of the vote, pushing Labour into third place. This was in no sense a breakthrough. Many more disappointments lay ahead. But it served as a much-needed tonic for a party which had known little but inexorable decline for the past two decades. It would also later attain a symbolic significance in view of Liberalism's more recent successes in the Scottish Highlands. Of probably greater importance for the future of Liberalism in Dumfriesshire was the decision taken in February 1955 to establish a South-West Scotland Liberal Federation, with the aim of 'bring[ing] together for mutual assistance groups and local associations of Liberals in the counties of Dumfriesshire and Galloway'. The revival of the Langholm Association had 'stirred the dying embers into flame, and, within a few weeks, the idea of the new federation began to take shape'. D. S. Macdonald, whose lone voice had been raised in opposition to the Liberal National take-over two decades earlier, was appointed secretary of the new body.<sup>55</sup>

To begin with, the organisers hoped that they would be able to work with, rather than against, the sitting Dumfriesshire MP. Unlike the so-called Dumfriesshire Liberal

Association, the new Federation was 'without ties of any kind with the Conservative Party'. But the organisers were realistic enough to see that Liberalism on its own would not be strong enough to regain the seat. 'It is a case of sharing the bed or getting out of it and allowing another to come in. Half a bed is better than none.'<sup>56</sup> Macpherson was a popular and well-regarded MP and many still took seriously his claim to represent both Conservative and Liberal interests in the House of Commons. 'I think', suggested one correspondent to the *Standard*, 'in certain circumstances, our member might make a good Liberal [who could] make his way back to the fold.'<sup>57</sup> Not surprisingly, however, the insistence of the Association that, as the price of cooperation, the Federation must join the National Liberal Association of Scotland left the new body with no alternative but to plough a lone furrow. With staggering gall the Dumfriesshire Liberal Association even voiced its regret that 'as the representative Liberal organisation in this county ... it was not consulted before the formation of the South-West Scotland Liberal Federation'.<sup>58</sup> Despite its newly re-found commitment to the doctrines of pure Liberalism, the *Standard* was cautious in its reaction. A three-cornered contest at the next general election would not produce a Liberal MP – 'the state of Liberal organisation in the constituency is such that no independent Liberal candidate would have a ghost of a chance' – but could well lead to the success of the Labour candidate.<sup>59</sup> Almost unconsciously, the newspaper seemed to be slipping back into a National Liberal mindset.

If it was to fulfil its objectives the new Federation needed now to rebuild a Liberal infrastructure in a constituency from which, outside Langholm, it had virtually disappeared. But it also had to dispel the belief, apparently still held by many voters, that Macpherson was in any meaningful sense a genuine Liberal. Local Liberals must be made to 'wake up and realise that the Tories are only using them as tools ... keeping their nominee, Major Macpherson, in the House of Commons'.<sup>60</sup> On this issue Sir Gordon Lethem, chairman of the Federation, was unequivocal. 'The blunt fact' was that the Dumfriesshire

Liberal Association was 'an empty name' and wholly dependent on its Conservative ally. There was no evidence that National Liberal MPs, including Macpherson, acted in any way differently from the general ruck of Tory MPs, notwithstanding numerous opportunities to bring Liberal influence to bear on major issues of policy.<sup>61</sup> The Scottish Liberal Party weighed in, declaring somewhat provocatively, that the National Liberals had 'as little connection with Liberalism today as the National Socialists with Socialism in the Germany of the 1930s'.<sup>62</sup> But the clearest way of differentiating the two creeds in the constituency remained the act of nominating a Liberal candidate to oppose Macpherson at the next general election, irrespective of the electoral consequences. Expectations of a three-cornered contest were high, but in the event the calling of an election in May 1955 by the new Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, left the South-West Scotland Liberal Federation insufficient time to organise as they would have liked. In the circumstances the Federation felt that it was 'best to fall in with the [Scottish Liberal] Party's plan to concentrate all their resources on five likely seats'.<sup>63</sup> The Liberals of Langholm offered their services in neighbouring Roxburgh and Selkirk where a Liberal candidate was standing.

The *Standard* now criticised both the Tory and Labour Parties for their efforts to woo the Liberal vote while attacking the Liberal Party. Opposition to Macpherson himself remained muted, with the newspaper continuing to stress his qualities as a constituency MP. But its message was clear enough:

With such bitter attacks by Tories on the Liberals the position of National Liberal and Conservative candidates who try to combine the viewpoints of both Parties in order to keep out the Socialists must be rather embarrassing, for it is hard to win over Liberals to the National Liberal or Conservative camp unless the fusion of Liberal and Conservative interests is more than a figment of the imagination.

In the absence of a Liberal candidate in Dumfriesshire, the *Standard*

predicted that many would-be Liberal voters would simply spoil their ballot papers.<sup>64</sup> When the results were declared, the paper, like most commentators sympathetic to the Liberal cause, found scope for mild satisfaction in the national picture, even though the party's Westminster contingent remained fixed at six MPs. For the first time since 1929 the party's position had not deteriorated compared with the previous general election and there had been a marginal increase in the average Liberal vote per contested constituency. Analysing the result in Dumfriesshire, where Macpherson was returned on a lower vote than in 1951, the *Standard* concluded that there was a 'reluctance on the part of a great many of the Liberals of Dumfriesshire to support a National Liberal candidate' and that 'under the noses of the statisticians, a definite swing towards pure Liberalism from National Liberalism is taking place here'.<sup>65</sup> Its verdict on the National Liberals themselves was harsh. 'They have fulfilled the destiny predicted for them twenty years ago; they have been swallowed up in the Conservative Party as completely as the Liberal Unionists before them ... What in the name of all hybrids does a Conservative-Liberal stand for?'<sup>66</sup>

Confirmed in power, the Eden government soon embarked upon a downward trajectory that led fatally to the Suez Crisis of 1956. That episode was of enormous importance nationally for the relationship between the Conservative and Liberal Parties, finally exposing the hollowness of a long-term and seductive courtship by the former, based on the premise that modern, progressive Conservatism represented all the best traditions of the historic Liberal Party. In Dumfriesshire it led to a marked deterioration in the relationship between the *Standard* and Niall Macpherson, now a junior minister at the Scottish Office, as the newspaper watched with dismay the MP's unswerving support for Eden's disastrous policy in the Middle East.

The dispute became public and obvious when Macpherson wrote to the *Standard* to criticise the actions of an anonymous Conservative MP who had sought to distance himself from the government's actions. 'Why', the newspaper asked, 'any MP who claims

to represent the Liberals should be so concerned about a Conservative MP who wants to keep the country out of war over Suez is beyond our comprehension, but it indicates, perhaps, where his true political sympathies lie.'<sup>67</sup> Reminding its readers that it opposed intervention in Egypt just as it had opposed intervention in the Boer republics half a century earlier, the *Standard* insisted that it had pursued a consistent line, except for 'one brief exception, when a former editor was suspected of "flirting" with the Tories'. By contrast, Macpherson claimed that, in seeking to separate the Israeli and Egyptian forces, the government was acting in 'the best interests ... of world peace'.<sup>68</sup> One member of the so-called Dumfriesshire Liberal Association explained that his support for Macpherson and Eden did not make him a Tory, but then went on to express his 'Liberalism' in the most illiberal terms:

I served some time in Egypt. I abhor the 'Wog'. He is a cunning, lazy and treacherous dog. They have been living under the British flag, but now they find they cannot make ends meet, and they are trying to usurp the canal ... As for the United Nations, why should we lie down to the 'Yanks' and have them tell us what to do?<sup>69</sup>

Increasingly, Liberal commentators, including the *Standard*, concluded that this situation could only be resolved if Macpherson was opposed by a genuine Liberal at the next general election which, granted the seismic upheaval which the Suez Crisis had entailed, might not be long delayed. If Suez had done nothing more,

it has shown that there can be no compromise between Conservatism and Liberalism and a man must be either one thing or the other. The difference between the Tories and the Liberals is just as great as that between the Tories and the Socialists, and from that there can be no escape.<sup>70</sup>

When the annual general meeting of the South-West Scotland Liberal Federation was held while the Suez Crisis was at its height, the

**Its verdict on the National Liberals themselves was harsh. 'They have fulfilled the destiny predicted for them twenty years ago; they have been swallowed up in the Conservative Party as completely as the Liberal Unionists before them ... What in the name of all hybrids does a Conservative-Liberal stand for?'**



## RE-ESTABLISHING THE FAITH

most pressing item on the agenda was the need to field candidates in both Dumfriesshire and Galloway at the next opportunity.<sup>71</sup> But Williamson would pay a heavy price for his increasingly strident columns. A brief notice on 22 June 1957 announced that the editor was leaving his post at the *Standard* with immediate effect.<sup>72</sup> Though the newspaper had transferred its loyalties, the directors of Messrs Thomas Hunter, Watson and Co. Ltd, who owned the *Standard*, had not.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, there was clear evidence of an organisational recovery in the constituency and in adjoining Galloway. By the end of 1956 branch associations had been set up in Wigtown, Dalry, Thornhill, Lochmaben and Moffat. This followed extensive door-to-door canvassing, with each household left a small card bearing the following words: 'We are calling Liberals. You may be a convinced Conservative or Socialist. If so, we respect your views and do not ask you to answer this. But if you are interested in Liberalism we do ask you to let us have your name and address. This will help us greatly and puts no obligation whatsoever on you. This card will be called for in a day or two.'<sup>74</sup> As the *Standard* reported, it was a heartening sign for Dumfriesshire Liberals that the Tories were making very determined efforts to try to prevent a Liberal candidate being nominated for the next general election.<sup>75</sup>

Such an eventuality, however, seemed increasingly likely. John Bannerman, chairman of the Scottish Liberal Party, whose heroic efforts to secure election at Inverness had made him something of a party hero, told an enthusiastic meeting of the Thornhill and District Liberal Association that he liked Macpherson personally and regarded him as a friend. But he would have no truck with the MP's political affiliation. It was the 'most deceptive and deceiving label from a political point of view which could well be devised'. Whatever they called themselves, the only aim of National Liberals was to 'hoodwink the people and to keep them from knowing what they really are' – Conservatives.<sup>76</sup> Over Easter 1957 students from the Glasgow University Liberal Club spent their vacation on house-to-house canvassing in Dumfries

itself, where the absence of a branch association was the most conspicuous weakness of the constituency party. These so-called 'commando raids' were an increasingly common manifestation of national efforts to kick-start Liberal organisation in the late 1950s.<sup>77</sup> In Dumfries the canvass would be 'the first stage in a campaign which will include public meetings to be addressed by prominent Liberals and which, it is hoped, will lead up to the adoption of a candidate to oppose the present Member in two years' time'.<sup>78</sup> The response was encouraging, suggesting that a large number of constituents intended, if given the chance, to vote Liberal at the next election. These were people who 'no longer think it possible for one candidate to stand for two Parties and be fair to both'.<sup>79</sup>

As a result, in September 1957 the decision was taken to form a Dumfries Burgh Liberal Association as a preliminary to nominating a parliamentary candidate. The event made the national press. The report in the *Manchester Guardian* captured the importance of the moment:

A small meeting in a small hall here tonight sent out to the world, like a pebble bouncing on a bass drum, some bravely booming echoes. The Liberals – straight Liberals, not what Mr John G. Wilson [Treasurer, Scottish Liberal Party] called 'hyphenated abominations' – met to form a town branch. Just that.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of the long road towards Liberal recovery in Dumfriesshire, Winston Churchill's description of the victory at El Alamein in 1942 seems apposite. It was not the end of the story. It was not even the beginning of the end. But it was perhaps the end of the beginning. The months and years ahead would hold further advances and setbacks in equal measure. A Dumfriesshire Liberal Association, in affiliation – as it was necessary to stress – with the Scottish Liberal Party and in support of the Parliamentary Liberal Party led by Jo Grimond, was finally set up in May 1959.<sup>81</sup> This decision meant, of course, that two bodies bearing the same title were now in existence. The following January, after considerable

pressure from the newcomer, the long-established Association finally agreed to change its name to 'National Liberal'.<sup>82</sup> Soon after the establishment of the new association, the Scottish Liberal Party appointed a full-time organiser for south-west Scotland, a sign that 'constituency activity and enthusiasm were reaching the stage at which [they were] beyond the scope of voluntary work'.<sup>83</sup> Then in the summer David Goodall, a school-teacher working in Glasgow but with family connections in Langholm, was chosen to stand at the general election.<sup>84</sup> When an election was called for October, however, the local association made the surprising decision that it was not ready to enter the contest, but would continue to prepare for the next.<sup>85</sup> Rumours circulated that this decision reflected a continuing National Liberal influence inside the new Liberal Association.

With his task thus eased, Macpherson once again secured re-election, albeit with a reduced majority over Labour at a time when, nationally, the Conservatives enjoyed a significant swing in their favour. Only with the MP's elevation to the peerage in 1963 and a resulting by-election did the voters of Dumfriesshire have the opportunity to support an unequivocally Liberal candidate, Charles Abernethy. Meanwhile, Macpherson's successor, David Colville Anderson, Solicitor General for Scotland, stood now as an unadulterated Conservative, while enjoying, it was said, the backing of the local National Liberal Association. Many, however, were sceptical as to whether that body was any longer a viable organisation. The Scottish Liberal Party claimed that the forthcoming contest would be, 'as it always had been in this constituency, between Conservatism and Liberalism', a curious gloss on the political history of the previous thirty years.<sup>86</sup> But even allowing for a measure of by-election hyperbole, Abernethy's performance in securing just 4,491 votes, only 10.9 per cent of the total, and losing his deposit, came as a bitter disappointment and probably contributed to the decision not to contest the seat again at the general election a year later. The notion that a body of Liberal support had simply been lent to a succession of National Liberal

**'A small meeting in a small hall here tonight sent out to the world, like a pebble bouncing on a bass drum, some bravely booming echoes. The Liberals – straight Liberals, not what Mr John G. Wilson [Treasurer, Scottish Liberal Party] called 'hyphenated abominations' – met to form a town branch. Just that.'**

MPs and could now be reclaimed had been cruelly exploded. The National Liberal interlude had done far greater harm than this to the Liberal cause.<sup>87</sup> An entire pattern of voting and political allegiance had been lost. Only after three decades in the wilderness did the local party have the basic infrastructure in place upon which it could build to repair the damage and hope for better days to come.

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- 1 An important exception is M. Egan, *Coming into Focus: The Transformation of the Liberal Party 1945–64* (Saarbrücken, 2009). The present article seeks to look at a single constituency over an extended period of time and confirms some of Egan's key conclusions, e.g. the importance of branch organisations to Liberal survival and revival in constituencies where the Liberal Association itself had ceased to exist. It also deals with issues such as the role of the local press not covered by Egan.
- 2 Egan, *Coming into Focus*, p. 20.
- 3 1918 saw a significant redistribution of seats, the first since 1885, to reflect a substantial redistribution of the country's population. Its electoral impact is considered in M. Kinnear, *The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885* (London, 1981), pp. 70–2.
- 4 The broader impact of the Liberal National defection on the fortunes of the Liberal Party is considered in D. Dutton, *Liberals in Schism: a History of the National Liberal Party* (London, 2008).
- 5 *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser* (hereafter *Standard*), 10 Oct. 1931.
- 6 *Standard*, 17 Oct. 1931.
- 7 *Standard*, 10 Oct. 1931.
- 8 *Standard*, 24 Oct. 1931.
- 9 *Standard*, 27 July 1935.
- 10 *Standard*, 27 Feb. 1932.
- 11 *Standard*, 12 Mar. 1932.
- 12 *Standard*, 30 Apr. 1932.
- 13 *Standard*, 18 Nov. 1933.
- 14 *Standard*, 26 May 1934.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Standard*, 3 Sept. 1949.
- 17 *Standard*, 15 Sept. 1934.
- 18 *Standard*, 31 July 1935.
- 19 *Manchester Guardian* 8 Aug. 1935.
- 20 See, for example, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Aug. 1935.
- 21 *Standard*, 27 and 31 Mar. 1943.
- 22 I found no mention of this fact in the pages of the newspaper between the formation of the National Government in 1931 and 1953, when a brief biographical sketch of Reid was published following his receipt of an award in the Coronation Honours list of that year.
- 23 *Standard*, 9 Apr. 1932.
- 24 *Standard*, 30 Apr. 1932.
- 25 *Standard*, 22 June 1932.
- 26 *Standard*, 13 Dec. 1933.
- 27 *Standard*, 8 Aug. 1934.
- 28 *Standard*, 5 May 1934.
- 29 *Standard*, 2 Nov. 1935.
- 30 *Standard*, 28 Aug. 1935, letter from D. S. Macdonald.
- 31 *Standard*, 21 Sept. 1935.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Standard*, 28 Sept. 1935.
- 34 *Standard*, 17 June 1936.
- 35 *Standard*, 24 June 1936, letter from Walter Scott Elliot.
- 36 First elected to parliament in 1935, Roberts rapidly emerged as a prominent campaigner for Liberal cooperation with the Labour Party as part of a Popular Front in opposition to the National Government. After losing his seat in 1950, he joined Labour in 1956 and contested Hexham in 1959. M. Pugh, 'The Liberal Party and the Popular Front', *English Historical Review*, cxxi, 494, p. 1332.
- 37 *Standard*, 17 June 1936.
- 38 *Standard*, 29 July 1936.
- 39 *Standard*, 6 Feb. 1937.
- 40 *Standard*, 17 Apr. 1937.
- 41 After the delay caused by the Second World War, Scott Elliot was duly elected as Labour MP for Accrington in the general election of 1945. He held junior office, but opposed the nationalisation of steel and did not stand for re-election in 1950. Indeed, his curious political odyssey continued when he appeared on a platform with Niall Macpherson, the National Liberal candidate, during the 1951 general election campaign in Dumfries. Scott Elliot achieved more fame in death than in life following his murder and that of his wife by their butler, Archibald Hall, in December 1977, a story which attracted considerable attention in the tabloid press.
- 42 *Standard*, 4 Mar. 1939, letter from D. S. Macdonald.
- 43 R. B. McCallum and A. Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (London, 1964), p. 75.
- 44 *Standard*, 24 Mar. 1945.
- 45 Ewart Library, Dumfries, box 10, McColl election leaflet, 1945.
- 46 *Standard*, 5 Mar. 1955.
- 47 Ewart Library, box 10, Macpherson election leaflet, 1945.
- 48 *Standard*, 28 July 1945.
- 49 *Standard*, 31 Mar. 1954.
- 50 *Standard*, 11 Sept. 1954.
- 51 *Standard*, 15 Sept. 1954.
- 52 *Standard*, 25 Sept. 1954.
- 53 *Standard*, 11 Dec. 1954.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 *Standard*, 19 Feb. 1955.
- 56 *Standard*, 23 Feb. 1955.
- 57 *Standard*, 2 Apr. 1955, letter from A. I. Milton.
- 58 *Standard*, 5 Mar. 1955.
- 59 *Standard*, 2 Mar. 1955.
- 60 *Standard*, 2 Apr. 1955, letter from J. Henderson.
- 61 *Standard*, 11 Mar. 1955, letter from Sir G. Lethem.
- 62 *Standard*, 4 May 1955.
- 63 *Standard*, 7 May 1955.
- 64 *Standard*, 21 May 1955.
- 65 *Standard*, 1 June 1955.
- 66 *Standard*, 28 May 1955.
- 67 *Standard*, 13 Oct. 1956.
- 68 *Standard*, 7 Nov. 1956.
- 69 Councillor T. R. Jardine quoted in *Standard*, 7 Nov. 1956.
- 70 *Standard*, 13 Oct. 1956.
- 71 *Standard*, 17 Nov. 1956.
- 72 Williamson was replaced by Robert Ferguson, parliamentary correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald*. *Standard*, 22 June 1957.
- 73 The story of Williamson's dismissal merits an article in its own right, which I hope to write in due course.
- 74 *Standard*, 14 Jan. 1956.
- 75 *Standard*, 20 Feb. 1957.
- 76 *Standard*, 23 Feb. 1957.
- 77 Egan, *Coming into Focus*, p. 118.
- 78 *Standard*, 23 Mar. 1957.
- 79 *Standard*, 13 Apr. 1957.
- 80 *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1957.
- 81 *Standard*, 9 May 1959.
- 82 *Standard*, 16 Jan. 1960.
- 83 *Standard*, 13 May 1959.
- 84 *Standard*, 8 Aug. 1959.
- 85 *Standard*, 16 Sept. 1959.
- 86 *Standard*, 23 Nov. 1963.
- 87 Comparisons with other constituencies are instructive. In Huddersfield William Mabane succeeded in taking the local Liberal Association with him when he defected to the Liberal Nationals, but faced opposition from the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*. The newspaper gave its support to the foundation in 1939 of a Huddersfield Borough Liberal Association, affiliated to the mainstream party. In Walsall, Joseph Leckie, who like Hunter in Dumfries was slow to reveal his Liberal National

*concluded on page 51*

Emily Davison, who had died as the result of a demonstration at the Derby in the previous year. A skeleton in female dress carries a placard, 'Votes for Women'.

Rather surprisingly, Walpole is not much featured, although we have a print of 1740 (for which Walpole seems to have paid), featuring him as 'the English colossus'. Many much more hostile, and occasionally obscene, cartoons of Walpole exist. Although political cartoons had been produced long before Walpole, there is something to be said for the view that it was Walpole himself who – quite inadvertently – gave the political cartoon its real impetus. Other kinds of satire on 'the first Prime Minister' were subjected to legal process, but for practical purposes the cartoon was exempt. Any legal action against the cartoonist would probably go before a London jury. The upshot would almost certainly be a decision in the cartoonist's favour, for Walpole was not loved in London. Once the idea of political cartoons got under way, there was no stopping it.

By contrast, many later politicians are repeatedly featured. Fox and Pitt, Gladstone and Disraeli, Lloyd George and Baldwin, are shown many times, and we have ample sidelights on their careers.

The location in which cartoons appeared is important to the story. Cartoons of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were mostly one-off publications, which sold at a price well beyond the pockets of working people. They might, however, be featured in shop windows, or in pubs and coffee houses. In the 1830s, however, cartoons became prominent in satirical magazines. The prices of (for example) *Figaro in London* (not featured in his book) would have made it accessible at least to skilled artisans. *Punch* first appeared in 1841, and was to remain the leading satirical magazine for well over a century. We are treated to a good deal of material from that source. At first, *Punch* was a really radical publication, deeply critical of poverty and social injustice. *Punch*, in its great days, had very much a mind of its own, and did not hesitate to criticise men of all parties when this seemed appropriate. Only in the twentieth century

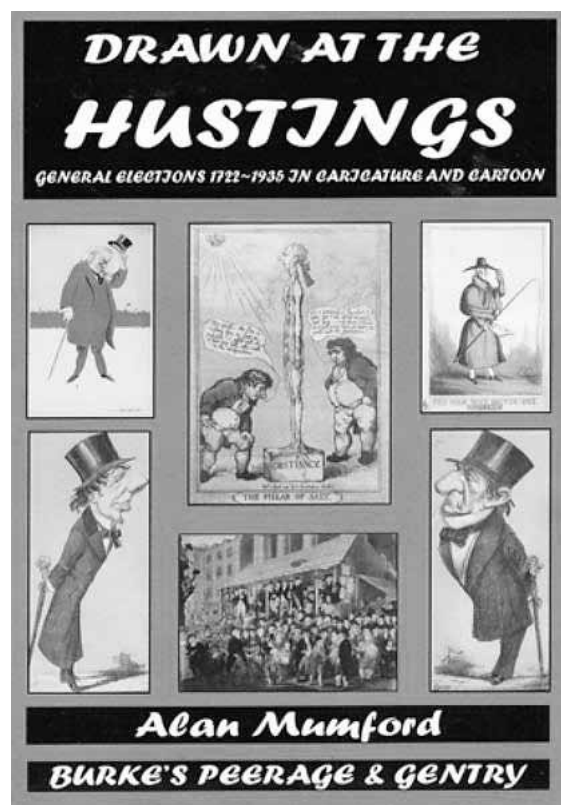
did it become a voice of the establishment, though it never became a party organ. It changed its character again after 1945, but that is outside the purview of the present book.

*Punch* soon generated rivals, and we see illustrations from two of these. *Judy* was consistently a voice of official Conservative opinion for most of its life, but towards the end, in the early twentieth century, it became more critical – lampooning Conservative Prime Minister Balfour, but extolling Joe Chamberlain. *Fun*, for most of its life, was Liberal, but it eventually broke with Gladstone around the time of his second Irish Home Rule Bill.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, cartoons begin to appear in a few newspapers, but until well after the period of this book the 'quality' press usually avoided them. Liberals were lucky, however, for the very doyen of political cartoonists in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth century was 'FCG' – Sir Francis Carruthers-Gould – who drew for the *Westminster Gazette*. The *Gazette* had a small, but very influential, circulation, mostly in London, and it could be regarded as an authoritative organ of official Liberal opinion.

Some cartoons became so famous that later cartoonists satirised them in a contemporary context. 'The hatch of the season', of January 1906, by AKT, is illustrated in this book. It is not well known, but makes an important point. It shows the new Liberal Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman as a hen who has just hatched a dangerous-looking chick, the Labour Party. It is based on a cartoon of the 1880s, not illustrated here, where the hen is Gladstone, who is mystified at the duckling Joseph Chamberlain, swimming on the waters of 'Radicalism'.

The author gives much attention in the text to just what happened in the elections, and also to information about the personalities involved. This should make the book easy to follow by readers who are not historians. The most serious blemish in an otherwise very helpful work is that there are a number of factual slips – though these errors do not destroy the value of the book, which provides many



useful sidelights on events and personalities.

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### Re-establishing the faith

*Continued from page 25*

conversion, also secured the backing of his local association. In Bradford South, by contrast, where Herbert Holdsworth delayed until 1938 before opting for the Liberal Nationals, the Liberal Association remained under the control of the mainstream party, though it was significantly weakened by the decision of many prominent activists to put their loyalty to Holdsworth before their commitment to the party under whose colours he had twice been elected. See D. Dutton, 'William Mabane and Huddersfield Politics, 1931-1947: By Any Other Name a Liberal', *Northern History*, xliii, 1 (2006) and D. Dutton, 'Liberal Nationalism and the Decline of the British Liberal Party: Three Case Studies', *Canadian Journal of History*, xliii (2007).