

Grimond was also a great believer in the power of politics. For that reason he used to hate staged photo-shoots which he regarded as insufficiently serious. He refused to take part in stunts such as pretending to sleep rough, always preferring reflective, rationale debate and the exchange of ideas. He insisted on reading the morning papers even when general election timetables required him to be elsewhere and held court at his home at Kew into the small hours with amusing anecdotes as well as serious debate about the election.

During the 1966 general election, Grimond's eldest son Andrew, committed suicide. The prime minister arranged for RAF transport to help him travel. Meadowcroft concluded that the shock of the death of his son took more out of Grimond than was realised at the time. In 1967 he resigned the party leadership against the advice of many in the party including Meadowcroft himself, saying he had had nearly ten years in which to get on or get out and he felt he had done all he could do. In retrospect however Meadowcroft believed Grimond had served one year too many. In the final year he got very stubborn and it was often necessary to have two people present at meetings with him to ensure he stuck to what he had agreed. His deafness, while it could be used to his advantage with people he preferred not to engage with, was getting to a point where it was a problem for him. Harry Cowie added that a major factor in his decision to retire was his sense of having been let down by Harold Wilson with whom Grimond felt he had an agreement to bring in proportional representation. Whether such an agreement was reached is unsure but there is no doubt Grimond did feel sidelined after the result of 1966 election. To end, Meadowcroft quoted Grimond as saying, 'What should alarm us about politicians is not that they break their promises but they frequently keep them.'

Tony Greaves ended the meeting with a reading from the Young Liberal publication *Gunfire*, which was named after Grimond's famous 'Sound of Gunfire' assembly speech. When it was written in 1968, Greaves was the editor of the publication. The article was headed

'The Grimond Generation'. 'We are the Grimond generation. Whether we like it or not most of joined and became active in the Liberals and Young Liberals when Jo Grimond was not only the Liberal leader, to all intents and purposes he was the Liberal Party. He had virtually no Parliamentary party and policy was whatever Jo said at the time. It must

have been shockingly undemocratic but we were newcomers and did not really notice. We joined because the Liberals (Jo Grimond) seemed to be bright and new and relevant and sensible.'

Graham Lippiatt is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

LETTERS

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Honor Balfour

It was fascinating to read about Honor Balfour in *Journal of Liberal History* 78 (spring 2013), not least because I was one of the people mentioned as having consulted her papers while she was alive. I thought readers would be interested to know more about this and about Honor in her later years.

I started the research for my doctorate on the Liberal Party 1945–64 in late 1994 and began the task of identifying suitable interviewees. My supervisor, Dr Michael Hart, mentioned that Honor Balfour lived locally and had fought a by-election during the Second World War as an independent Liberal. I contacted Cotswolds Liberal Democrats and got her address. In those pre-Google days I knew nothing about Honor: all I had to go on was the close result in Darwen in 1943.

We met in Burford in January 1995. She was tiny, spoke in precise terms, and seemed amused to be of interest to a research student. I was crammed into her tiny car for the short drive to her cottage at Windrush. There it was soon clear that she had a passion for post-war British politics. Her library was enormous. She owned the biography or autobiography of every major politician active during her career. She had incisive views on the current political scene, when New Labour was on the rise and the Major government was beginning to collapse. Although she was not a name-dropper, it was clear that she still had links to the politicians from the 1950s, 60s and 70s whom

she had interviewed. Former cabinet ministers sometimes dropped in for lunch.

My interview covered her early political career, her views on the Liberal Party during the war, the circumstances of the Darwen by-election and her subsequent interest in politics. A left-wing Liberal, she had been tempted to join the Labour Party, not least because Harold Laski offered her a choice of safe Labour seats, but she had been put off by the party's link with the trade unions. Had she taken up Laski's offer she might well have become a cabinet minister under Harold Wilson (whom she knew at Oxford). Instead she committed herself to a career in journalism.

Towards the end of the interview Honor said that she had some papers upstairs which might be of interest so, mindful of the time of the bus back to Oxford, I arranged to return. When I did so I was ushered up to a spare room and invited to rifle through some boxes of papers, press clippings and photos. Some were hers and some she had inherited from Lancelot Spicer, head of the Liberal Party's Radical Action group in the 1940s. Here was a treasure trove of information which had not previously seen the light of day and which I wrote up in my thesis and then for an article in this *Journal* ('Radical Action and the Liberal Party during the Second World War', *Journal* 63, summer 2009). As a research student, finding something new and interesting was like discovering gold dust.

During this and a later visit I discovered that Honor was also a talented cook. I was treated to a three-course lunch with beer – a cut above my usual student lifestyle. I liked her tomato salad so much I borrowed the recipe, and still use it today. When I finished with the papers Honor asked if I could arrange for them to be deposited at her old college, St Anne's. I suggested that the Bodleian would be a more suitable home for them and put her in touch with the archivist. I am delighted that her papers are now there, properly catalogued and cared for.

I kept in touch with Honor after my research ended and visited her for the last time shortly before her death. Suffering from emphysema and reliant on oxygen, she was as cheerful as ever, looking out from her book-lined study over the Cotswolds countryside.

Mark Egan

1963 Dumfries by-election

David Dutton's fascinating tale of the *Dumfries Standard* in your last splendid issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013) dealt rather lightly with the 1963 by-election at which the hapless Liberal candidate Charles Abernethy lost his deposit. It was an object lesson in the result of the Liberal Party not fighting the seat for so long.

I was assistant secretary of the Scottish Liberal Party at the time and was sent down to help organise the campaign, for which I was very grateful because without that experience I would never have accepted to abandon my PPC role in Edinburgh and step into the sudden vacancy next door in Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles. What happened in Dumfries was that on Sunday afternoons I held a strategy meeting at which each branch reported in. I was told: 'we are doing rather well in Eskdalemuir' – a community with about 180 voters on the roll, and: 'insufficient returns from Dumfries burgh', which had some 18,000 voters. Indeed, only two turned up for the eve-of-poll rally in the burgh.

So when I tackled the Borders seat I said 'forget the 53 villages and with our limited forces concentrate on the eight towns'. That post-Dumfriesshire strategy paid off in 1964, reducing the Tory majority of nearly 10,000 to under 2,000 and paving the way for the successful by-election in 1965.

David Steel (*Lord Steel of Aikwood*)

Aubrey Herbert

I met Aubrey Herbert (noted in letters, *Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013), in the early 1960s when we both served on the Liberal Council. A most approachable, genial, laid-back character, he had a fund of numerous political anecdotes which he told with wit and deliberate understatement, in a measured, Leslie-Phillips-style drawl. At Chester in the bitter general election of 1931, he was hospitalised after a Conservative official, yelling 'You traitor! Treason!' rammed an umbrella, point first, into his chest, where it stuck fast between two ribs. Aubrey was one of those Liberals who would be my first choice as a dinner party guest. I find myself wondering once more: 'Where have all the Liberal characters gone?'

Lionel King

Liberals and Ireland

In the review of Gerald R. Hall's *Ulster Liberalism* by Eugenio F. Biagini (*Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013), there was a reference to Irish Presbyterians as 'Nonconformists'. Surely, after the disestablishment of the Church of England in Ireland in 1869, there were no 'Nonconformists' in Ireland.

Further, following Irish criticism of the 1871 Irish Land Act for not providing for fair rents and fixity of tenure, and, with the defeat of the 1873 Irish Universities Bill, with 43 (mainly Irish) Liberal MPs voting with the Conservatives, as the Bill did not provide for a state-funded Roman Catholic university, most Irish Liberal MPs elected in 1868 contested

the 1874 general election as candidates of the new Irish Home Rule Party, or were defeated by such candidates. This had disastrous consequences for the Victorian Liberal Party in Ireland, reaching a nadir at the 1886 general election, when there was only one Liberal candidate in Ireland.

James Fargher, in his wide-ranging article on 'The South African War and its effect on the Liberal [–Irish Nationalist] Alliance', might have mentioned that there was not only a temporary *de facto* Conservative–Irish Nationalist alliance at the 1900 general election but also at the 1885 general election. Indeed, if 17 more pro-home rule Liberal MPs had been elected in 1885, the first Irish Home Rule Bill would have secured a Second Reading on 8 June 1886, and the next challenge to the Liberal government would not have been a general election but the Conservative (and Liberal Unionist) majority in the House of Lords.

Moreover, the home-rule-by-stages approach agreed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, with Asquith and Grey, and then with the Irish Nationalist leadership in November 1905, led on to the 1907 Irish Council Bill. However, the Bill made no progress as it was unanimously rejected by an Irish National Convention in Dublin during the Whit-sun recess, given that it offered

neither as much as Gladstone's Home Rule Bills nor the Dual Monarchy approach then favoured by the new Sinn Fein movement (founded in 1905) nor the aspirations of the semi-secret Irish Republican Brotherhood, and also by reason of priestly opposition to secular control of Irish schools. The Irish Parliamentary Party was now in the position that any further appearance of compromising in relation to the fuller Irish demands would be fatal electorally – as would be the case some eleven years later.

Finally, mention should also be made of the Irish Home Rule motion, with the wording agreed with the dying Campbell-Bannerman, carried by 313 votes to 159 in the House of Commons in late March 1908.

Dr Sandy S. Waugh

Women leaders

In this spring's edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 78), in the report on the 'Mothers of Liberty' conference fringe meeting, a statement is attributed to one of the parliamentarian speakers that 'Kirsty Williams ... is currently the only female leader of any part of the Liberal Democrats'. This overlooks Fiona Hall MEP, who has been our leader in the European Parliament since 2009, and who will lead us superbly in next year's election.

Anthony Hook

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