

in the north of Ireland were considerably more seditious than anything ever argued by the suffragettes. McKenna astutely connived at Christabel's self-enforced exile in France (to avoid further imprisonment) and acted to reduce the WSPU's income by threatening prosecution of donors.

The stakes were steadily raised on both sides. The government's new Bill had to be withdrawn for technical reasons early in 1913. WSPU militancy moved into full-scale arson (including an attack on Lloyd George's house) and rudimentary bombs. The government introduced the 'Cat and Mouse' Act which allowed prisoners to be released under licence if hunger striking was endangering their health, and then rearrested when they had recovered. Emmeline Pankhurst was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, a significantly more severe sentence than anything handed down before. Asquith, now under regular police protection, was taunted in the House of Commons: 'You will go down in history as the man who tortured innocent women. You should be driven from public life.'

Martin Pugh believes that these levels of militancy eventually became self-defeating. He demonstrates the fall in WSPU membership and income in the last years before the First World War. He also traces the mounting criticism of the Pankhursts from within the movement. Christabel, in Paris, was seen as too remote and unable to compromise. With her mother she expelled Sylvia and Adela, which was seen as indicative of their autocratic methods. There were concerns about the use of WSPU funds for their personal needs. And many members were simply worn

out by the endless round of arrest, prison, hunger strike and forced feeding. When McKenna offered the opportunity of absolute release in exchange for a promise of good behaviour it was widely, if discreetly, accepted. By 1914 Asquith was also sounding more conciliatory, aware of the need to hold a general election before the end of 1915 and anxious not to be outflanked by Labour and Conservative commitments to women's suffrage.

This was the state of affairs when war broke out. The government offered an immediate 'truce' which the WSPU – by now aware of its possible disintegration – were pleased to accept without loss of face. Emmeline and Christabel joined the war effort to promote industrial peace, and Sylvia to alleviate suffering in the East End of London. Meanwhile the recommendations of a Speaker's Conference at the end of 1916 enfranchised all men over the age of twenty-one and all women over thirty, subject to conditions including residence, possession of a local government vote or marriage to a local government voter. At a stroke 8.4 million women were enfranchised. In the Commons MPs voted through the changes by a majority of 330. In the Lords Curzon recommended that the Conservative peers abstain, thus assuring the Bill's passage before the election that would follow the war.

By then however the WSPU had been dissolved. Emmeline and Christabel had formed a new Women's Party as a vehicle for the latter's Parliamentary ambitions as a Coupon candidate in 1918. But the Pankhursts' hour of glory was over. Christabel was defeated and

although as individuals their actions were to command headlines for years to come they would never again aspire to their prewar effectiveness nor to so compelling a cause.

The Pankhursts left few records but Martin Pugh's meticulous research has painted a more rounded picture of the family than have previous biographers, including a greater awareness of Adela's role prior to her departure for Australia. He has addressed sensitively issues such as the relationship of WSPU members to women's movements more generally, and the nature of the very close friendships, sometimes physical, between a number of the leading protagonists. He portrays convincingly the intensity with which the Pankhursts pursued their various causes even to each other's detriment. Disappointingly, however, he does not attempt to analyse the extent to which the suffragettes *per se* achieved the vote for women, or whether this

would have been achieved in any case through constitutional means. The Liberal Party does not come out well from his story. He understands the party political considerations that so influenced Lloyd George but criticises Asquith's failure of leadership when it was needed and his preparedness to connive at measures that were basically illiberal.

Pugh has not been well-served by his editors. There is some repetition of events as he moves from sister to sister. Minor characters enter and leave the narrative without explanation. And the index is not worthy of a serious publisher. But this is not to detract from a fine biography of a dysfunctional family which, whatever its faults, succeeded in keeping women's suffrage on the agenda of a government that had chosen to follow other priorities.

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A writer and pragmatist at the Liberal High Table

John Powell (ed.): *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (The Historians Press, 1996; 323 pp.)

Reviewed by **David Cloke**

Perhaps the first thought that springs to mind on reading the title of this book is 'Who and why?' Although an earlier book on Kimberley has been reviewed in these pages (*Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 23: Summer 1999) his is not a name normally associated with the great Liberal figures

of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is fair to say, however, that Powell largely succeeds in tackling these initially rather sceptical thoughts.

Whilst it is unclear from the title, this is not a biography of Kimberley. It is a collection of 274 documents including 251 letters (both from and to Kimberley),

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fourteen political memoranda and three addresses. Hence the rather confusing starting date of 1843, when in fact Kimberley was born in 1826. Powell's purpose is to provide a 'study in the political personality of an individual and a party'. For this reason he has largely omitted papers dealing with Kimberley's family, religion (although an early letter from Rome reveals him to be strongly anti-Catholic), estate management and Norfolk society. Whilst these omissions may be no great loss to the readers of this journal, Powell acknowledges their importance to Kimberley and the need for a complete biography of the man.

Powell has clearly mastered a vast amount of material. Kimberley produced thousands of letters, despatches and memoranda during his long life. What Powell has sought to do is to arrange the key texts to two ends – firstly to outline the nature of Kimberley's liberalism, both in theory and practice, and secondly to place him in his historical context.

The book sensibly begins with a portrait gallery of the key figures in Kimberley's life; a useful reversal of normal practice. Powell follows these with a lengthy introduction outlining his case for the significance of Kimberley's political life. This could

possibly have followed the letters as it would have enabled us to draw our own conclusions before reading Powell's. Nonetheless, the introduction does usefully place Kimberley's life in its historical and political context, although Powell sometimes requires quite a high level of prior knowledge. For example, he mentions the Marriage Law Amendment Bill and Kimberley's reaction to its opponents, without stating what the bill proposed and hence showing what Kimberley's views were on the matter. The structure of the introduction, whereby Powell looks at Kimberley's life from various vantage points, also means that there is a certain amount of duplication. He mentions that Kimberley was fluent in French on at least four occasions! Conversely other important events, such as his time in St Petersburg, are skated over, which can sometimes cause confusion.

Possibly the most significant events of Kimberley's life predate the first letter in the collection. Between December 1833 and February 1835 his father, great-grandfather and two sisters died. A brother was born posthumously and was, thereafter, doted on by their mother. Not surprisingly, therefore, Kimberley grew up a rather serious young man, but also a hard-working one. A complete biography might usefully delve more deeply into these events. Another consequence of his father's early death was that Kimberley became the heir to the Wodehouse peerage, to which he duly succeeded in May 1846 on the death of his grandfather. This thrust him into the heart of political life from a very early age. He made his maiden speech in the House of Lords

in 1850 and was appointed Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in December 1852. As Powell says, 'he was routinely privy to confidential information about the gravest matters from all parts of the world'. Apart from two years as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he spent his career devoted to foreign and colonial affairs. His private thoughts on these issues are to be found in some of the letters quoted and are a valuable source of information to those interested in or who are studying British foreign and colonial policy of the time.

Even before his appointment in 1852, Kimberley found himself at the heart of foreign affairs during his honeymoon in Italy in 1848. Just as he was travelling through northern Italy the revolt against Austrian rule broke out. A lengthy letter to his mother describes his experiences. Whilst his rather formal English is a little dry, something of the excitement of the events is conveyed. Interestingly, shortly afterwards Kimberley began reading about the French Revolution, and his more considered thoughts on such events are also contained in this collection. Indeed, a combination of voracious reading, research and drawing from practical experience seems to have been a feature of his character throughout his life. He took a rational approach to the proposals before him, asking 'Is it useful?' and 'Will it work?'

He comes across, therefore, as a serious but committed man. He was clearly ambitious and, even in the more fluid politics of the 1850s, quite party political. For example, towards the end of the Crimean War he wrote to Major-General Windham in the Crimea,

seeking his agreement to becoming a Liberal candidate in Norfolk at the next general election. In his early career he assiduously cultivated men of influence. This was entirely necessary for one coming from outside the normal political circles. The book is quite revealing, therefore, about how politics was conducted in this period, particularly the importance of personal political relationships. For Powell, Kimberley's cultivation of these personal relationships makes him a valuable mediator in inter- and intra-party conflicts. His sheer longevity and experience made him a cornerstone of the Liberal Party in parliament by the 1880s. Indeed, he was a member of every Liberal cabinet from 1868 to 1895 and remained as Liberal Leader in the Lords until his death.

His presence at the Liberal high table for so long should by itself make his letters and papers invaluable. It is clear that he was a valued and trusted colleague of Gladstone and other key Liberal figures, and not just on foreign affairs: his experience in Ireland continued to be drawn on. His conduct of cabinet government would seem to be a model – while he was a keen critic round the cabinet table, he was an effective defender of the government's position beyond it. His imperialism may seem to make his brand of Liberalism rather distant to us, while his support for colonial autonomy may connect him to more recent Liberal thinking. His 'belief in the potential for progress through administration' is heart-warming for any civil servant.

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