

Gould, the Pharaoh of focus groups: 'The mystique surrounding them is ridiculous: they are simply eight people in a room talking.' It sounds so cosy; but of course they are talking to Tony Blair, via Philip Gould. The ultimate manifestation of what Lord Butler called 'sofa government' perhaps. I am sure there are cabinet ministers who wish they were listened to so attentively.

This is a book which I can recommend. A slight unevenness

and a distant whiff of footnotes are more than compensated for by some interesting new source material and an unusual and worthwhile perspective.

Lord Holme of Cheltenham is a former President of the Liberal Party, advisor to David Steel and Paddy Ashdown, manifesto coordinator of the 1992 Liberal Democrat election campaign and chairman of the 1997 campaign.

New guide to political archives

Chris Cook: *The Routledge Guide to British Political Archives: Sources since 1945* (Routledge, 2006)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Students of twentieth-century British political history have long been accustomed to turn to the now well-worn series of five volumes of *Sources in British Political History*, edited by Dr Chris Cook (formerly Head of the Modern Archives Unit at the London School of Economics), published between 1975 and 1985. Those volumes have proved extremely useful guides over the years, but they did contain a number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies. This new volume, covering the period from the end of World War Two almost to the present, is to be warmly welcomed and fills a distinct gap, as new archives are becoming available to the researcher almost daily. The volume is notably easy to use and impressively comprehensive in scope. It covers a total of more than two thousand non-governmental archives.

The text is conveniently divided into two sections: individual politicians and political activists; and organisations, institutions and societies that have exercised a bearing on British political and public life since 1945. The section on individuals – running to

more than a thousand entries – gives brief career details, a concise summary of the scope and contents of their surviving papers, details of restrictions on access (although these have now sometimes been superseded by the application of the Freedom of Information Act, 2003, which came into effect in January 2005), the National Register of Archives reference number of the catalogues, and references to other and fuller published accounts of the papers like Hazlehurst and Woodland's invaluable *Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers*. The section on organisations and societies gives helpful potted histories of the bodies in question and some account of their internal structure. These include a large number of political parties, trades unions and pressure groups. Very valuable, too, are the numerous cross-references and additional snippets of helpful information. The standard of accuracy in the individual entries is extremely high and reflects meticulous preparation on the part of the compiler and his assistants.

The vast majority of the archives covered in this volume

are of course in public repositories, but it also includes entries for some important archive groups which remain in private hands such as those of Winnie Ewing and Baroness Falkender. There is sometimes a somewhat strange imbalance in the nature of the entries. Important political figures like Geoffrey Howe, William Whitelaw and Harold Wilson receive very brief entries, while little-known politicians and activists are given fairly extended accounts. The entries on the national archives of the major political parties and organisations like the TUC, the NUM and CND are especially full and helpful.

Generally, the guide is very comprehensive. Welsh archives are certainly very well represented. The only really important omission from the holdings of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales is the extensive papers of Lord Goronwy-Roberts. Other significant archives not included from among the holdings of the NLW include the records of the Association of Welsh Local Authorities and the papers of Cynog Dafis MP, Ron Evans (the local constituency agent to Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot) and Robin Reeves. Among more recent accessions which do not feature in the book are the papers of Roderic Bowen MP and those of Lord Crickhowell. It is, of course, inevitable that any reference volume of this kind begins to date as soon as it is published.

There are a few strange observations too. The archive of Lord Edmund-Davies is described as 'a large collection of papers' (p. 66) and that of Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris as 'a substantial collection of correspondence and other papers' (p. 142). Both of these archive groups are, in fact, very small and relatively disappointing. The much more extensive archive of the papers of Lord Elwyn-Jones is described as 'reportedly closed' (p. 68) which is not the

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case. These, however, are very minor quibbles, and the general standard of accuracy (and indeed recency) of the entries throughout the volume is very high.

One final grouse – the price of the volume (although a handsome tome) at £125 is extremely high. Few individuals are likely to fork out for this volume, and even libraries, ever-conscious of making the best use of their precious book funds, are likely to think twice.

In conclusion, however, it is an obligation to welcome this invaluable guide most warmly.

It will undoubtedly prove an invaluable research tool to all those working in the field of post-1945 British political history. Once again the prolific Dr Chris Cook has placed us all in his debt. One looks forward eagerly to the promised major companion volume on European archives during the same period which is already in active preparation.

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Liberal Party I joined' (p. 74)), and the divergence between local and central views, particularly over Europe. They are also clear, however, about the growing professionalism of the central organisation, and the key role played by Paddy Ashdown's hyperactive leadership in reconstructing the party after merger.

The bulk of the book, however, is given over to a detailed analysis of the profile of Lib Dem support in the electorate, from socioeconomic, geographical and issue-based points of view, and party strategy in seeking to maximise its support in the 1997–2001 period. This includes a series of case studies of individual constituency campaigns in areas chosen to reflect different levels and histories of Liberal support: Devon North, Montgomeryshire ('heartland'); Colchester, Sheffield Hallam ('expanding heartland'); Bridgewater, Cheadle (Conservative–Lib Dem marginals); and Aberdeen South and Oldham East & Saddleworth (Labour–Lib Dem marginals). On the basis of all this, the authors examine a number of hypotheses which can help to explain the basis and growth of Liberal Democrat electoral support.

The 'alternative opposition' hypothesis rests on the party's historical record as an anti-Conservative party, best placed to do well where Labour are weakest ('Conservatives are the opposition, Labour the competition'). This is borne out in some of the case studies, and supported by the fact that Lib Dem voters tend to resemble Labour supporters much more than they do Conservatives in their social and geographic backgrounds. Pursuing this line of reasoning leads the authors to highlight the difficulty of trying to win Conservative seats while opposing Conservative views, and they conclude that 'clashes with the Conservatives remain the vital electoral battleground for the Liberal Democrats in the

Who votes for the Liberal Democrats? And why?

Andrew Russell and Edward Fieldhouse: *Neither Left nor Right? The Liberal Democrats and the Electorate* (Manchester University Press, 2005)

Reviewed by **Duncan Brack**

One of the more notable developments in political studies in recent years has been a revival of interest in the Liberal Democrats. Whereas ten years ago there was still only one short history of the party available, now there are three, with one more to come soon. Similarly, whereas papers on Liberal politics at academic conferences were a rarity in the early 1990s, nowadays there are often several. *Neither Left nor Right* is another component in this revival of studies of political Liberalism: a heavyweight analysis of the electoral support of the Liberal Democrats in the 1997 and 2001 elections.

The book starts with a basic history of the party from its origins in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately these first two chapters are not up to the standards of the rest of the book, including very little about what the party actually did when it was in power (something of an

occupational hazard of political scientists, as opposed to historians), a very uneven treatment of topics like community politics, and a number of rather obvious errors, including claiming the merged party came into existence in 1989 (rather than the actual date of 1988) and stating that Lib Dems no longer control Liverpool (while they have done continuously since 1998).

The other two introductory chapters, on the structure of the party and on the tension between grassroots and leadership, based partly on an extensive series of interviews, are rather better. Russell and Fieldhouse bring out well the strength of the party in its local activist base, and the attitudes that tend to follow (I particularly liked the quote from the election agent who claimed that 'If ever we lose our ability to embarrass the leadership as a party, even when we are in government, then we won't be the

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