

## University Liberals

Seth Thevoz traces the development of a university Liberal club in the three decades before the First World War.

# Cambridge University Liberal Club A study in early university



**T**HE GROWTH OF political clubs in universities was a feature of the Edwardian boom in associations and societies, and in the 1900s universities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Oxford first sprouted active Conservative and Liberal associations. Prior to that, political activity in Victorian universities had been focused around dining rather than campaigning. Cambridge University Liberal Club (CULC) was thus unusually early in its 1886 foundation, and a study of its first thirty years – up to its suspension during the First World War – offers numerous insights into the changing dynamic of

Victorian and Edwardian politics in a university constituency. As a membership society meeting in private rooms, it also stood in contrast to the more spatially defined Liberal clubs of Victorian Britain that were centred around fixed premises like clubhouses.<sup>1</sup>

Cambridge already had the Union as a debating society, and two Conservative dining societies: the short-lived Cambridge University Conservative Association of 1882, and its more durable successor launched the following year, the Cambridge University Carlton Club (CUCC), which endured until 1907.<sup>2</sup> In the mid 1880s,

# beral Club, 1886–1916: ty political organisation

CUCC was a sizeable body, and caused sufficient concern to Cambridge's Liberals that the Liberal Club was founded in response. In the words of the *Daily News*, 'The want of such a club has been for some time greatly felt by the undergraduates and it is intended to counteract the efforts of the C.U. Carlton Club.'<sup>3</sup> By contrast, Oxford had a thriving political dining culture: its Tories had the OU Carlton Club, the Canning Club, and the Chatham Club, whilst the Oxford Liberals had two radical dining societies of their own, the Russell Club and the Palmerston Club, which would not merge to form the more campaigns-oriented Oxford University Liberal Club until 1913.<sup>4</sup> *The Times* observed in 1885 of the existing Oxford organisations that 'the purpose of these clubs is part social and part educational, and they take no part in elections other than the occasional supply of election speakers for election platforms, in the performance of which duty they are not encouraged by the University authorities';<sup>5</sup> a sentiment shared by the young Charles Trevelyan, who told CULC in 1891 that Oxford 'have no organisation, and no centre of Liberalism'.<sup>6</sup> If Cambridge's Liberal Club had any parallel, it was with the Peel Club formed in 1836 at Glasgow University, which focused its attention on campaigns for the distinctively Scottish office of Rector, and most of whose activists were dons rather than students.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, it resembled CULC for the latter's first ten years.

A meeting in March 1886 appointed a provisional committee and passed a constitution, but the national political situation intervened, and nothing more was done until after the July general election, with the first meeting of the society on 22 November 1886.<sup>8</sup> An influential figure in early years was Leopold Maxse (subsequently editor of the Conservative *National Review*), whom Oscar Browning recalled 'was at that time as staunch a Liberal as he is now a Tory'.<sup>9</sup> The November meeting confirmed the organisation's distinctive shape. It was open to fellows and

students alike at the university, but fellows initially dominated the committee. The brunt of the organisational workload was borne by the Secretaries, who resigned with alarming frequency. Gladstone was elected as the first President, but declined to turn up for his inaugural address, and was substituted by Earl Spencer.<sup>10</sup>

By 1887, the society already had a network of College Secretaries in place in most of the university's constituent colleges, and numbered 194 members, although its Treasurer Browning complained 'only 100 have paid their subscriptions', despite broadly healthy finances.<sup>11</sup> CULC was sufficiently well-endowed by January 1888 to be able to employ a Clerk of the Club, paying them an annual stipend of £5.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the year, the society was holding eight meetings a year, but pledged future ones 'to be of a less formal and a more social nature'.<sup>13</sup> However, the classic problem of societies with student members persisted: high turnover, leading to rapid rises and falls in fortune. R. Shilleto Dower of St John's College complained to CULC's Secretary Charles Trevelyan in 1895, 'I cannot help think of *any* keen Liberal in John's at present. Liberalism has fallen on evil days, I'm afraid in what was formerly the head-quarters of Cambridge Radicalism!'<sup>14</sup>

In the society's early years, Cambridge University was an overwhelmingly male environment: all but two of Cambridge's twenty colleges admitted men only, and women were not awarded degrees until 1897; and in line with most other university societies, CULC did not admit women. Yet membership for women was an issue which was frequently raised. A committee meeting on 11 May 1887 discussed the society's first talk by Professor A. V. Dicey, and 'it was decided that ladies from Newnham and Girton should be admitted to the gallery', segregating the audience.<sup>15</sup> By 1894, 'The Senior Secretary [Bertrand Russell] was empowered to proceed with negotiations for the admission to membership of the Club of women of Newnham

Left: Horse cabs at the Senate House (left) and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge University, 1880 (photo courtesy Swedish National Heritage Board Flickr Commons)

## Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation

College.<sup>16</sup> The society was confronted by opposition from an unexpected quarter – fellows of the women’s colleges themselves. Helen Gladstone (daughter of the Grand Old Man), a fellow of Newnham College, who had herself previously spoken on a CULC platform,<sup>17</sup> wrote to the society’s Secretary Maurice Sheldon Amos on 10 May 1894 that ‘we have come to our conclusion, on no political grounds, & with no sort of intention of disturbing students too much’ of refusing to allow the women of Newnham to join. She cited ‘various reasons, which would take too long to detail, & some of which you will no doubt imagine for yourself’, and she enlisted eminent classicist Henry Sidgwick (then a Liberal Unionist) to confirm her position. She did, however, make the concession that the ‘informal arrangement’ of ‘paying some subscription towards the expenses of your meetings ... might acquire our right to regular information as to the meetings & speakers, & to admission to a certain number? ... I should be glad to be responsible for conveying the subscription, & we should continue to have the pleasure (as so often before) of attending the meetings.’<sup>18</sup> Six days later Alice Robinson, a Liberal at Newnham, wrote to Trevelyan ‘the present position of Newnham College in the University does not warrant so pronounced a departure. We therefore regret that under the circumstances we feel bound to ask you to take no further steps in the matter.’<sup>19</sup> In short, the women of Newnham were to continue to be active in Liberal politics, but only if they could occupy a segregated gallery. Such sentiments were not uncommon, bringing to mind the 1890s hysteria for gender segregation in London theatres, derided by the young Winston Churchill as ‘the prowling of the prudes.’<sup>20</sup> Women were finally admitted to CULC as full members in 1909; however, the society would not elect its first women president, Sally Randall, until 1953.

An important connection in the society’s early years was the Eighty Club. Named after the year of its foundation, 1880, it was a group dedicated to improving links between the Liberal Party and the universities. Never a club in the nineteenth-century sense of possessing a clubhouse, it initially formed an influential network for Liberal thinkers. CULC first considered hosting joint events with the Eighty Club in November 1887,<sup>21</sup> and an inaugural joint meeting a year later was such a success that CULC rapidly formally affiliated with the Eighty Club.<sup>22</sup> The arrangement was, at first, highly beneficial to both. The Eighty Club offered eminent speakers, larger audiences, and (in the 1890s) the facilities to publish addresses to CULC as pamphlets. CULC in return provided an opportunity for dozens of London Liberals to enjoy an annual outing to Cambridge. The affiliation with the Eighty Club also brought out a more social side in CULC, with the introduction of ‘at home’ events to entertain the visiting Londoners. The minutes provide the following vignette

**Women were finally admitted to CULC as full members in 1909; however, the society would not elect its first women president, Sally Randall, until 1953.**

of a typical ‘at home’ in Oscar Browning’s rooms at King’s:

Mr. Symes played the violin, Mr. Wyatt sang, Mr. [Anton] Bertram [subsequently Chief Justice of Ceylon] recited, and Mr. R. C. Lehmann [then the Liberal candidate for Cambridge city] made a short speech reviewing very briefly the political situation. About 50 members of the club were present.<sup>23</sup>

Browning’s ‘at home’ evenings also provided one of the few opportunities available to Cambridge’s nineteenth-century undergraduates for mixed-sex socialising, with the society’s minutes stressing ‘the ladies of the [Cambridge city] Women’s Liberal Club should be invited’, and after 40–50 women from the club were asked to attend, noted ‘the invitation was warmly responded to.’<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the Eighty Club also seems to have provided a way of maintaining contact with alumni. Shilleto Dower, upon leaving St John’s in 1895, wrote to Charles Trevelyan, ‘I am very sorry to sever my connections with the CU Liberal Club in which I have great interest, but hope sometime to join the Eighty.’<sup>25</sup>

What cannot be emphasised enough is the role played in the society’s formative years by its erstwhile Treasurer, Oscar Browning. Browning was a controversial historian, dismissed from his post at Eton in 1875 over allegations of pederasty involving the young George Nathaniel Curzon. He was a Fellow of King’s for over forty years, and combined an enthusiasm for Ancient Rome with a strong, bullish manner, and notoriously sloppy scholarship. He was omnipresent in Cambridge societies, his biographer Ian Anstruther writing he was ‘President, Treasurer, Chairman or Secretary of more than a dozen organisations and hardly a student club existed whether for sport or psychical research, for music, drama or social converse, of which he was not at least patron’,<sup>26</sup> including the Apostles, the Epicureans debating society, the Political Union, the Dante group, and the Cambridge Union – of which he was Treasurer for twenty-one years. Richard Davenport-Hines notes ‘He became detested by dons, if not undergraduates, as a bore “all coated and scaled with egotism, and covered with prickles” ... Homosexuality and snobbery were entrenched for life’,<sup>27</sup> while Anstruther went on to write ‘He was good, bad, a fool, a genius; every adjective seemed to fit him.’<sup>28</sup> His ubiquitousness in Cambridge life was accentuated by his considerable weight, a well-known Cambridge rhyme of the early 1900s being:

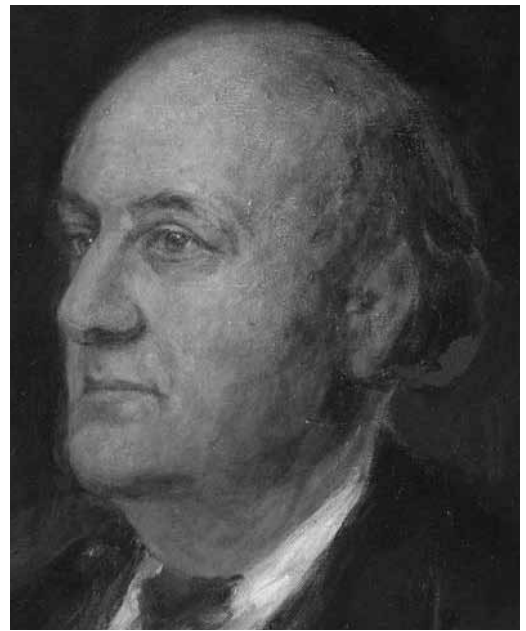
O.B., Oh be obedient  
To Nature’s stern decrees,  
For though you be but one O.B.  
You may be too obese.<sup>29</sup>

Of his politics, H. E. Wortham notes he ‘was a lifelong Liberal. More indeed, for he belonged

to that left wing of the Party which, led by John Morley, went to the root of things and gloried in the name of Radical.<sup>30</sup> Although a thrice-unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, Browning's main outlet for his political interests was the university Liberal Club. Browning took his CULC responsibilities sufficiently seriously that he offered his resignation as Treasurer in 1890 on the grounds of having missed one solitary meeting (even though he had been one of the committee's most regular attendees until then).<sup>31</sup> Browning came to dominate the society in the 1890s, hosting a series of events in his rooms at King's, including committee meetings, sherry parties and the larger 'at home' evenings.<sup>32</sup> When the committee chairman was absent, Browning would stand in.<sup>33</sup>

His final, controversial dismissal as Treasurer in November 1896 was a direct reflection of how he had come to dominate the society, and a widespread feeling that for too long he had exerted an almost tyrannical influence, and it is worth relating in full the following account from W. E. Crook, then Secretary of the Eighty Club:

Whether it was due to his 'imperial headpiece', or to his profound knowledge of the Roman Empire, or to an uncanny insight into future political developments, 'O.B.' had gradually absorbed into his own person all the offices in the Cambridge University Liberal Club. He was Treasurer, Secretary, Committee, as well as President, all rolled into one, under the forms of democratic government, following faithfully in the footsteps of the Emperor Augustus, and anticipating with equal fidelity the twentieth-century evolution of Signor Mussolini. [Browning was technically only the society's Treasurer, but this account underlines his centrality to the organisation.] When the university Liberal Club was in debt, he paid its debts; when it required a speaker of distinction, he chose and invited them; in fact, he *was* the university Liberal Club. This state of things produced a revolt, led by [Dr] Verrall, of Trinity, among the Liberal dons, and among the undergraduates by Charles Trevelyan, likewise of Trinity, backed by most of the young university Liberals. The King's men, however led by H. C. Gutteridge, with college patriotism, supported 'O.B.' Trevelyan persuaded the Eighty Club Committee (the university Liberal Club was affiliated to the Eighty Club) that Liberalism in Cambridge would be killed unless 'O.B.' could be dethroned – an operation which they had unsuccessfully tried to accomplish. The Eighty Club assigned me to the duty of going down to Cambridge to dethrone the uncrowned king, as painful but necessary a duty as I had ever been called upon to perform. 'O.B.', whom I had known fairly well, as soon as he heard of my coming, invited me to be his guest, and proved, as always, a delightful host, though he must have suspected the object of my mission. After a long and painful interview, Oscar Browning, then in tears,



From top:

Oscar Browning, 1890s

Helen Gladstone, 1880

Cambridge students demonstrating against the proposed admission of women to degrees, 1897

promised he would resign. The Cambridge University Liberal Club was the darling of his heart, and in spite of his very ‘imperial’ conduct, he had served it well. I imagine few people ever saw this most genial and masterful of dons in tears.<sup>34</sup>

The tensions around Browning’s resignation were reflected in the minute book, which conspicuously lacked the customary vote of thanks that invariably accompanied every other resignation of the period, simply reading: ‘A committee meeting was held in Mr Browning’s rooms on Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> ... The Treasurer handed in his resignation which was accepted by the committee.’<sup>35</sup> Browning remained an active fellow of King’s until his enforced retirement in 1909, continuing to attend CULC meetings up until then, usually to promote King’s College members in internal elections. At the Annual General Meeting of 1899, Oscar Browning attempted to delay fresh committee elections for one term, ‘objecting to the preponderance of Trinity [College] influence in the proposed Committee’, but was voted down.<sup>36</sup>

The dismissal of Browning was the most dramatic phase of a quiet revolution which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, as students slowly began to prise leadership of the society from the fellows. In 1889, the committee of six that was dominated by fellows was broadened to a committee of ten, of which at least five members had to have not yet taken their MA. Next, Browning’s 1896 dismissal precipitated a change in the balance of power in the society. Instead of the President being elected as a figurehead (who, as often as not, would fail to turn up, following Gladstone’s example), the society began electing senior members of the university as more ‘hands-on’ presidents. During the five years of this system, it is unsurprising that the names involved were the classicists Henry Jackson and Matthew Pattison Muir, and mathematician Donald MacAlister, each of whom had been long-serving committee members. Further steps were taken in 1899, when it was deemed that the society’s president and treasurer should always be ‘of MA standing’ (i.e. a graduate of the university), and that ‘at least one Secretary’ should be ‘below MA standing’ (i.e. still a student).<sup>37</sup> Finally, in 1902, the young Edwin Samuel Montagu moved an amendment at the AGM which allowed those who had not yet taken their Cambridge MAs to take up the presidency of the society. Once the motion was passed, he was subsequently elected at the same meeting as the society’s first ‘student’ president.<sup>38</sup>

A shorter-lived transformation occurred at the same time as the students gradually took more control over the society. Between 1897 and 1902, CULC flirted with focusing its activities around its newly created Political Circle. This was simultaneously chaired by Matthew Pattison Muir whilst he was also president of CULC. Its remit ‘for the discussion of political subjects’ indicated a lack of recent activity in that area, and the circle

alternated between external speakers, and pressing its own members to give papers.<sup>39</sup> It should be seen in the context of other contemporary discussion groups amongst liberal intellectuals of the era, such as the Bloomsbury-based Rainbow Circle, which had considerable overlap with CULC alumni.<sup>40</sup> Election to the Political Circle was conducted along the lines of a traditional gentlemen’s club of the day, with existing members being able to wield a blackball – although only one unfortunate candidate found himself so repeatedly blackballed as to have never been admitted.<sup>41</sup> The circle could be a difficult audience, often responding to papers with sharp criticisms.<sup>42</sup> The group was small, being limited to no more than twenty-four members *in statu pupillari*, and with attendance at meetings invariably being smaller. Although over sixty people were members over the circle’s five-year existence, the rapidity of turnover as students turned into finalists ensured that typical attendance at meetings varied from anything between five and fifteen, which contrasted with the hundred-plus attendance found at CULC’s annual dinners. The Political Circle provided an exceptional concentration of interesting figures, including nine future Members of Parliament, nine presidents of the Cambridge Union, and numerous academics.<sup>43</sup> It thus functioned as an ‘inner sanctum’ of CULC during these years, meeting far more regularly than the whole society, and incorporating all of its senior officeholders.

The emphasis on the Political Circle’s discussions also helped to conceal the scale of Liberal decline at a time when Lord Salisbury’s Unionist government enjoyed considerable popularity, and the Political Circle resolved ‘to use the utmost endeavours to ... augment as far as possible the size of the Club.’<sup>44</sup> Certainly, the club had shrunk since 1886, and a Michaelmas 1900 membership list showed just seventy-four members, twenty-four of whom were life members, i.e. mostly dons.<sup>45</sup> The situation grew worse during the ‘Khaki election’ of 1900, held amidst a patriotic frenzy in the immediate aftermath of British victories in the Boer War.<sup>46</sup> Cambridge’s Liberals felt distinctly at a loss as to how to respond to this, with Pattison Muir urging members to ‘forget the vulgarities of a khaki election ... they needed reminding of the great issues of politics’ – a cry which fell on deaf ears, as the Liberals did not contest the Cambridge constituency, giving the Conservatives a free run of the constituency for first time since 1831.<sup>47</sup> In the face of such organisational shortcomings, Dr Donald MacAlister of the society tried to give an alternative (and unconvincing) explanation of its function, arguing:

The University Liberal Club ... [is] not a mere party organisation. It [is] an educational institution, and one of the things they were most proud of was that Liberals desired to ascertain the reason for which was to be done, and having ascertained the reason to educate others.<sup>48</sup>

**The dismissal of Browning was the most dramatic phase of a quiet revolution which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, as students slowly began to prise leadership of the society from the fellows.**

The Boer War presented a particularly awkward problem for the society, as Liberals were seriously divided over the nature and objectives of the war, yet this did not deter CULC from making it the most common theme of their speaker meetings, with Alfred Ravenscroft Kennedy (later a Conservative MP and judge) delivering five talks on such related topics as ‘The Peace Conference’ and ‘Imperial Defence’, and other speakers on the topic included Whig historian G. M. Trevelyan, and a guest from South Africa, H. S. Van Zyl.

Instead of campaigning in Cambridge, the society focused its attention on the nearby Cambridgeshire constituency of Chesterton, with efforts being coordinated by Edwin Samuel Montagu, who subsequently gave a talk on ‘Electioneering in 1900’. Montagu’s interest in the division was not purely philanthropic, as he became its candidate for the 1906 general election, and was then returned as its MP until 1922. Montagu made little attempt to conceal how ambitious he was, with a revealing Freudian slip in CULC minutes in his hand (in an entry signed by him), noting that ‘The first meeting of term was held on February 5 in the President’s Secretary’s Room at Trinity’.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout its earlier years, the society had already begun to use its unique position to attract numerous speakers whose appeal could be decidedly apolitical – the society’s second speaker meeting comprised a lecture on constitutionalism by Professor A. V. Dicey; while Oscar Wilde spoke in 1889, sharing a platform with Lord Monkswell. Especially remarkable was when Sir Charles Dilke spoke in favour of reductions to the army and navy in Easter 1895, it being a rare public engagement after he was cited in the divorce scandal which ruined his political career a decade earlier. The *Daily News* noted that, ‘Although no public announcement of the meeting had been made, there was a large attendance, there being more undergraduates present than is generally the case at such gatherings under the auspices of this club.’<sup>50</sup> The event had not been without controversy, with CULC members complaining about the invitation having been issued, and the membership being balloted on whether to withdraw the invitation. In the end, the society voted by sixty-three members to thirty-six against its withdrawal.<sup>51</sup> Despite the evident curiosity aroused by this recently disgraced politician, contemporary press reports indicated a sympathetic audience. Yet unsurprisingly, attendance at the more run-of-the-mill meetings could be derisory, with a ‘lamentably small’ turnout to hear Herbert Samuel on ‘the New Liberalism’ in February 1896, and turnout was merely ‘fair’ when Bertrand Russell spoke on ‘independent labour politics in Germany’ the following month.<sup>52</sup>

Until the Boer War, the dominant topic of speaker meetings was Irish Home Rule. By 1900, the society had held at least thirteen speaker meetings on either Ireland or Home Rule. Strong feelings on Ireland were also in evidence from

**From around 1903 to 1914, CULC enjoyed its greatest period of political dominance, with no Conservative organisation at all after the collapse of the CU Carlton Club around 1907, and only a weak CU Fabian Society after 1905.**

the society’s 1889 deliberations over the latest imprisonment of Irish Nationalist MP William O’Brien. O’Brien was a controversial figure, in and out of prison on several public order offences, and previous protests over his imprisonment had included the November 1887 Bloody Sunday riots in Trafalgar Square. On 2 February 1889, Pattison Muir called a meeting of CULC’s committee, ‘to consider whether the Club should take any action to protest against the prison treatment of Mr. W. O’Brien MP.’ In the event, ‘It was thought that for the Club to hold an indignation meeting would be exceeding its functions, but it was decided to assist the Town Association to organise a meeting, the club members of the C.U.L.C. taking part not as a club but as individuals’, with the club donating two pounds for this purpose, and deputing Pattison Muir to speak.<sup>53</sup>

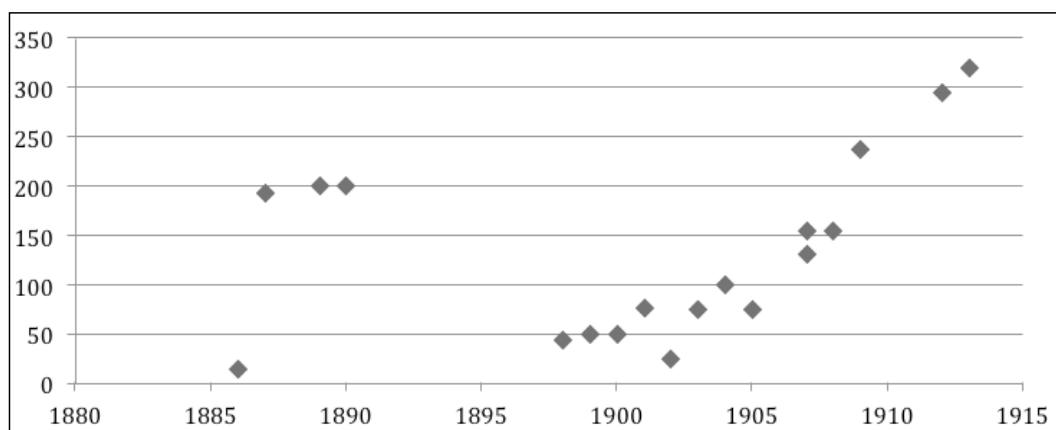
Whilst the society went through lean years in the early 1900s, its membership declining at one point to twenty-four, its fortunes revived considerably in the wake of the Tariff Reform controversy. The post-1903 boom in Liberal fortunes would remain strong in the university until the First World War, and after a small wobble, the society’s membership would grow exponentially until the outbreak of war (see Fig. 1). From around 1903 to 1914, CULC enjoyed its greatest period of political dominance, with no Conservative organisation at all after the collapse of the CU Carlton Club around 1907, and only a weak CU Fabian Society after 1905.

CULC’s rising political dominance in Edwardian Cambridge also coincided with the involvement of John Maynard Keynes, first as Secretary and then as CULC’s second student president after Montagu. Peter Clarke argues ‘Keynes was a political animal, to an extent that has rarely been given its due. The big Bloomsbury biographies that have flourished during recent decades have illuminated many passages in his life but have generally played down the politics’,<sup>54</sup> although Keynes’ most comprehensive biographer, Robert Skidelsky, asserts that Keynes ‘joined the University Liberal Club, because the Liberals were the party of intelligence, not because he had any enthusiasm for reform.’<sup>55</sup> Keynes was president at a transformative phase in the society when it was increasing its level of campaigning activity, although he cannot be singlehandedly credited with its revival, as the society experienced a blip in membership during his term of office. He would remain involved with the society for decades, intermittently serving as a committee member until the First World War, regularly attending dinners, and occasionally stepping in as a speaker.<sup>56</sup> Looking back over Keynes’ 1904–5 presidency, CULC Secretary James H. Bowes asked, ‘whether the time has not come to replace our somewhat inactive policy – suitable to the conditions of the last five years – by a more aggressive one.’<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, at the 1905 AGM, Keynes reintroduced the ‘College Secretary’

## Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation

Fig. 1 Membership of CULC, 1886–1916

Source: references to membership figures reported intermittently in *Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97*, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge; *Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, October 1897–June 1915*, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.



system which the society had been lacking for over a decade.<sup>58</sup>

The only reference to the 1906 general election in the minutes was by A. L. Hobhouse (later a Liberal MP and founder of the National Parks) noting, ‘the stimulus given to the Club by the events of January 1906’, which seemed by the end of that year to have been short-lived, with the Secretary’s report citing a stabilised membership.<sup>59</sup> However, if one projects the society’s known membership onto a scattergraph (see Figure 1), it becomes apparent that 1906 was simply a transitional phase in the Edwardian expansion of the society.

The 1906 general election was also significant as the only time the society would see a Liberal Member of Parliament elected for the city constituency. This was prominent King’s Counsel Stanley Buckmaster, who subsequently served as Asquith’s Lord Chancellor. The society was evidently attached to Buckmaster, judging by the warmth of the speeches at a ceremony in May 1911, in which they paid their respects to him for his time as Cambridge’s MP. The society maintained a strong interest in Buckmaster’s career even after this, congratulating him in 1913 when he was appointed Solicitor-General.<sup>60</sup>

Cambridge was by no means the most unexpected Liberal gain of the 1906 landslide, having long been a Conservative-leaning marginal. In the last two Liberal general election victories of 1885 and 1892, the Conservative margins of victory in Cambridge had been just 107 and 255 votes respectively. Buckmaster won the seat by 308 votes. In the two hung parliaments of 1910, Buckmaster would lose the seat in the January election by 587 votes, and would fail to retake it in December by 343 votes (having been unseated by Almeric Paget, a Conservative now best remembered for the somewhat improbable creation of a national massage service for troops in the First World War).

It was against the backdrop of these electoral contests that the society resumed its active campaigning role, something which had fallen into abeyance in the 1890s. Amidst the campaigning activity of this period, the society took steps to maximise its press publicity, inviting reporters to attend speaker meetings.<sup>61</sup> In June 1910, the midpoint between the two general elections of

that year, CULC Secretary Geoffrey Marchand reported on the club’s ambitious speaking schedule, ‘The policy of sending members of the Club out into the neighbouring constituency has been continued this year with marked success’, which was true insofar as neighbouring Chesterton was concerned, but overlooked the defeat in Cambridge itself. The influence of Montagu and his persistent appeals for help in Chesterton were apparent in the remainder of Marchand’s report:

In view of an approaching General Election an appeal for speakers was made early in the Michaelmas Term. Some twenty-five members responded to the appeal, and these speakers addressed nearly 100 meetings before Christmas. During the vacation a further appeal was issued for help during the actual campaign. This also met with a ready response, members of the Club, and especially the Ladies doing much canvassing on behalf of Mr. Montagu. Mr. Montagu, and his agent, Mr. Guyalt, have both expressed their appreciation of the work done in the constituency by members of the Club, and it is desirable that this work should continue, if possible on an extended scale.<sup>62</sup>

Marchand’s successor as Secretary William Brooke (younger brother of the poet Rupert Brooke, who was himself President of the CU Fabian Society) reported that the society continued its campaigning efforts in the December 1910 election, holding nearly 150 meetings in the two Conservative-held seats of Cambridge and Newmarket, whilst,

As is usual the club gave most of its assistance to Mr. Montagu in West Cambs [Chesterton], sending on one night as many as twenty speakers into the division. Mr. Montagu wrote after his election to say that if it had not been for the help of the Club he would not have succeeded in holding the seat.<sup>63</sup>

Montagu’s claim may not have been an exaggeration. Having been elected in 1906 by just 513 votes, he held on in the two 1910 elections by 505 and 371 votes respectively. By the time of the next

general election, in 1918, the society had been suspended; but in the aftermath of the two 1910 elections, CULC was keen to remain active in this sphere. CULC Secretary Hubert Douglas Henderson (subsequently a noted economist and magazine editor) reported in 1912 there had been:

no general election during the past year & no great political activity in the constituencies around Cambridge. There has thus been no considerable call upon the Club for speakers to address meetings in the neighbouring villages. But this is a side of the Club's activities which should not be altogether neglected & the Secretary accordingly appeals to those members willing to take part in this kind of work to intimate for him their readiness to do so.<sup>64</sup>

Until the outbreak of war, there was a strong desire for the club to continue playing a central role in Cambridgeshire politics, with Barclay Nihill (later Chief Justice of Kenya) recording in October 1913 that, 'Speakers are constantly being applied for', in neighbouring constituencies, and a year later William McNair wrote, 'the value of such work can hardly be over-estimated.'<sup>65</sup> This is consistent with the argument laid out by Trevor Wilson fifty years ago, that contrary to the conclusions drawn by George Dangerfield's polemic, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, Liberal electoral organisation in the country at large was strong at least until the First World War, with CULC's emphasis on electoral campaigning being a case in point.<sup>66</sup>

Internally, the main controversy which engulfed the society was the battle over admitting women. This was not heavily contested within the society, for by 1908 a clear consensus in favour of women members had emerged. In the interim, the society had continued to invite students from the two women's colleges, Newnham and Girton, to speaker meetings, but they continued to be segregated in upper gallery seating, and were not permitted to stay for drinks afterwards. It was the society's link with the Eighty Club which caused problems in fully admitting women members. The Eighty Club not only refused to admit women members, but also barred women as dinner guests, and they feared that if women should ever be elected as CULC officers (who were invited *ex officio* to the joint annual dinners), embarrassment would result. The question of going ahead with admission was raised at the 1908 AGM, where it was decided 'that the meeting was in favour of the step', but that in view of the value of the link with the Eighty Club, CULC would put the issue to a vote of members. The minutes made it clear that this vote was primarily aimed at strengthening the society's hand in renewing its demands for women's members: 'it was decided that no mention of the Eighty Club should be made in the questions put to members. The reason for this step was a desire to obtain an unprejudiced

opinion on the principle, in order that Mr. Shepard & Mr. McNair, when they approached the Eighty Club should have a dead mandate from the club for such actions.' [strikethrough preserved from the original]<sup>67</sup>

The poll of members went ahead in December 1908, presenting three options. The results were declared at a Special General Meeting:

In favour of unconditional admission	54 [59.3%]
~~~~~ limited ~~~~~	24 [26.4%]
Opposed under any conditions	13 [14.3%]

(At the time, the society had around 190 members, so it seems around half of them did not vote.)

The meeting promptly passed a motion granting students from Newnham and Girton the right to full membership. However, an attempt by CULC's former President John Tresidder Shepard to ensure women members were 'without disability of office' was defeated by an amendment from former Secretary Arnold McNair. McNair further secured the meeting's agreement that a committee of no more than four members (including CULC President Ernest Evans, later Liberal MP for the University of Wales) should form a committee that would announce CULC's decision at the forthcoming Eighty Club AGM, and negotiate any necessary compromises.<sup>68</sup>

This was finally ratified on 10 February 1909, after the Eighty Club had reluctantly consented, following a stormy AGM in which the Eighty Club committee initially refused to recognise the CULC decision, but was eventually voted down by its own membership.<sup>69</sup> The Eighty Club insisted, as a concession, that a new rule should be inserted into the CULC constitution:

Whenever a member of Girton or Newnham College is elected to the office of Secretary, that office shall become duplicated, and a member of the University shall also be elected to the office of Secretary, to exercise the privileges of the affiliation with the Eighty Club, and generally to act as Secretary in all dealings with the Eighty Club.<sup>70</sup>

However, no woman was elected to any of the senior offices of the society before the disbandment of the society under these rules in 1916, and so this curious compromise was never exercised. Having accepted this, the society formally admitted women members to join, also amending its constitution to state that it was 'open only to members of the University or of Girton or Newnham College, who are in general sympathy with the objects of the Liberal Party.'<sup>71</sup> The decision was a helpful one, for the club's Secretary George Toulmin observed later in the year that 'The meetings, the dinner, the finances of the club have all benefitted by the reinforcement the club has had', noting that membership had risen in one year from 155 (plus thirty-five life members) to 238 (plus thirty-nine life members), although it recognised, 'the increase is

**'As is usual the club gave most of its assistance to Mr. Montagu in West Cambs [Ches-terton], sending on one night as many as twenty speakers into the division. Mr. Montagu wrote after his election to say that if it had not been for the help of the Club he would not have succeeded in holding the seat.'**



## Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation



From top:

Front of the menu of the 1906 joint dinner between CULC and the Eighty Club, with guest speaker Rufus Isaacs

John Tresidder Sheppard, 1911

Stanley Buckmaster, MP for Cambridge 1906–10 (*Vanity Fair* cartoon, 1913)

by no means wholly due to the new members from Girton and Newnham.<sup>72</sup>

A symptom of the club's expansion in the Edwardian era was its need to create extra roles. In 1903, after a period of membership contraction, the society had ceased electing a committee beyond the four basic senior officers, but by 1910 there was a sufficient pool of competing candidates for the full committee of ten to be revived.<sup>73</sup>

The club's growing near-monopoly of Cambridge student politics brought other challenges. In the absence of any official Conservative association, CULC began to attract members whose sympathies were not particularly Liberal. Future Conservative cabinet minister J. C. C. Davidson recalled:

My political interests developed early, but it was not until I went up to Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1907 to read Law that I joined a political club. It was the Liberal Club. I must confess that the reasons for adhering myself to the Liberals were not wholly political, and that financial considerations came into the matter. It was not only because I had been born in Aberdeen that I thought that five shillings for the Liberal Club was a better bargain, considering the sort of speeches that were delivered there, than a guinea for the ultra-Conservative Pitt Club.<sup>74</sup> I didn't believe in the Liberals' politics, but thought that five shillings was a very reasonable price. I heard Augustine Birrell and other excellent Liberal speakers, who did not affect my politics in the slightest, but gave very good value for money!<sup>75</sup>

F. M. Cornford, a fellow of Trinity and a member of the CU Fabian Society's committee, mocked this overlap between university Liberals and Conservatives in his classic 1908 satire on university politics, *Microcosmographia Academica*, offering some telling insights into how the Edwardian Fabians viewed the Cambridge Liberals as blurring with Conservatives:

*A Conservative Liberal* is a broad-minded man, who thinks that something ought to be done, only not anything that anyone now desires, but something which was not done in 1881–2.

*A Liberal Conservative* is a broad-minded man, who thinks that something ought to be done, only not anything that anyone now desires; and that most things which were done in 1881–2 ought to be undone ...

No-one can tell the difference between a *Liberal Conservative* Caucus and *Conservative Liberal* one ... At election times each of these two Caucuses meets to select for nomination those members of its own party who are most likely to be mistaken ... for members of the other party.<sup>76</sup>

Another symptom of the society's prominence was its success in elections to the Cambridge Union, the university's debating society,

particularly in securing the presidency. This success in Union elections predated the expansion of CULC's membership, and it seems fair to attribute it as much to the calibre of candidates and their electoral tactics as to the development of any Liberal voting bloc. Nonetheless, between 1900 and 1916, no less than 26 Union presidents were active Liberals, with an uninterrupted run of six Liberal presidents over five terms between Easter 1904 and Michaelmas 1905, and several more runs of three Liberal presidents in a row. For the only time in their history, the Liberals were the dominant force in Cambridge Union politics.

This heavy involvement in Union politics naturally attracted the attention of the student press. *The Gownsmen* offered short, acerbic observations on the dominant speakers of the day, including several CULC notables. Hubert Douglas Henderson, 'though very partisan, was extremely sound.'<sup>77</sup> Philip Vos was, 'an inexhaustible mine of historical justifications, political erudition, and Herculean energy.'<sup>78</sup> Keynes, having long since graduated, but still participating in debates as a fellow of King's, 'was delightfully humorous.'<sup>79</sup> Looking back on this period, CULC member Wilson Harris, who had been president of the Union in 1905, wrote: 'I retain still the impression made on me by the majestic Edwin Montagu, of Trinity, in the [Union] chair in my first term. Montagu was a politician – Liberal – to his backbone.'<sup>80</sup> At greater length, Wilson recalled,

On oratorical merits the day was with the Liberals. Trinity, it is true, throughout the period, produced a number of Conservative Presidents ... but they did not outweigh J. T. Sheppard, the two Irishmen from St. John's, J. C. Arnold and M. F. J. McDonnell, and in my own year Maynard Keynes and Kenneth Mozley (with myself, as the last of that year, tagging laboriously behind). Keynes and Mozley were a notable combination. Constant speakers, they were almost invariably on the same side (except when Keynes once surprisingly came out as a defender of Imperialism) vigorously upholding Liberal doctrines in their quite different ways.<sup>81</sup>

A further price of the society's prominence and expansion was to be found in the discontent that began to be expressed by the increasing membership, over both the club's direction and its organisation. William Brooke looked back over his time as Secretary on the committee of Dennis Holme Robertson (later an eminent economist) in 1911, and cattily noted:

The many suggestions made for the improvement of the Club seem to divide themselves into three departments:

- 1) Those which attack the incompetence of the Secretary
- 2) Those which say that 'something' undefined ought to be done

**The one potential challenge to CULC's political supremacy came late in 1905 with the formation of Cambridge University Fabian Society, the forerunner of what would eventually become the Labour Club.**

- 3) Those which give some practical suggestion. If the Secretary may be permitted to give his opinion, the most hopeful blame is in the work of the college secretaries, and in the commandeering by the club of one day in the week for definite meetings.<sup>82</sup>

The society responded to the transformation in its scale by experimenting with new meeting formats, with Secretary Hubert Douglas Henderson remarking that the highest attendances were at meetings where afternoon tea was served.<sup>83</sup> It also continued to draw in unconventional speakers, including Gandhi's mentor, the Indian nationalist Gopal Krishna Gokhale in November 1904, novelist G. K. Chesterton in February 1905, and CULC alumnus Bertrand Russell, who spoke on women's suffrage in November 1907.

The one potential challenge to CULC's political supremacy came late in 1905 with the formation of Cambridge University Fabian Society, the forerunner of what would eventually become the Labour Club. It was not until 1934 that one of many fracturings of the left would result in a splinter CU Labour Club being set up. Until then, CU Fabian Society frequently served as a *de facto* Labour Club, drawing support from socialists in the absence of a more formal Labour organisation. Given that nationally, the Fabian Society still drew links with the liberal as well as the socialist tradition, and the prevalence of Edwardian 'Lib-Labbery', there was no immediate need to see the creation of CU Fabian Society as a threat to the Liberal hegemony. Indeed, several of CULC's best-known members from Maynard Keynes to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson were simultaneously members of the Fabians. Accordingly, CULC hosted a well-attended joint meeting with the CU Fabian Society in Michaelmas 1908, which 'aroused great interest.'<sup>84</sup>

Yet there were also signs of antagonism. Several members of CU Fabian Society displayed a marked antipathy to the Liberals. The Fabians rapidly built up their membership, with sixty members in their first year, and 100 in 1910.<sup>85</sup> By 1915, the Fabian Society sufficiently identified with the socialist (and not liberal) strand of Fabianism to rechristen itself Cambridge University Socialist Society. The Liberals were acquiring a rival; albeit a weaker one.

The arrival of the First World War presented a new set of challenges for CULC. Despite widespread assumptions that the war would be 'over by Christmas', already by October 1914 outgoing Secretary William McNair wrote that he hoped 'the Club will be able to carry on its activities even if somewhat reduced at the present critical time.'<sup>86</sup> The rapid mobilisation of new recruits heavily affected the society, and at the beginning of Michaelmas 1914 it was 'without its President or Secretary, who were engaged in military duties', and at one point, 'there was left only one member of the committee.'<sup>87</sup> On 11 November,

CULC called a special meeting of its members to discuss the club's role in wartime. A consensus was reached that the society ought to hold 'as many meetings as possible, which were to be of a non-political nature, &, further, political work in the town & country were to be temporarily suspended', but that the society should keep going, 'with a view to resuming normal activities as soon as possible after the war'.<sup>88</sup> The following letter was then circulated to members:

On all hands it has been thought desirable that, in spite of the present emergency, the organization of the C.U. Liberal Club should at any rate be kept alive. It is of course not proposed that we should engage in active propaganda or discussion of a politically controversial nature; but it is felt that the life of the Club should be maintained until it can resume its normal activities.<sup>89</sup>

Amidst such upheavals, the society failed to organise a single speaker meeting for the whole of Michaelmas 1914, but it showed some signs of returning to normal in 1915, holding five meetings across Lent and Easter terms. Unsurprisingly, the topics all related to the war in some way: 'Belgium during the war', 'the democratic control of foreign policy', 'Europe after the war', 'European diplomacy in the Near East', and 'nationality and empire'. The calibre of speakers noticeably declined, with most being Cambridge fellows – although a notable exception was the last talk, when the society attracted former Cape Colony Prime Minister W. P. Schreiner.

Simmering beneath the surface were numerous tensions brought about by the war. The Edwardian Liberal Party constituted a diverse coalition, encompassing a breadth of opinion from moderates through Nonconformists to socialists. Conscription caused particular controversy, with sharply dissenting opinions over Lloyd George's proposals to introduce a draft.<sup>90</sup> In Cambridge, the conscription dimension could be seen through the resignation of one of CULC's most supportive dons, an active pacifist who had been Secretary of the society in the 1890s. Bertrand Russell wrote to the City Liberal Association:

I am sorry to say that I cannot renew my subscription to the Cambridge Liberal Association, and I do not wish any longer to be a member of it. One of my chief reasons for supporting the Liberal Party was that I thought them less likely than the Unionists to engage in a European war. It turns out that ever since they have been in office they have engaged in deceiving their supporters, and in secretly pursuing a policy of which the outcome is abhorrent to me. Under these circumstances I can do nothing directly or indirectly to support the present Government.<sup>91</sup>

Within a year, Russell was dismissed from his post at Cambridge under the Defence of the

**The first thirty years of Cambridge University Liberal Club thus offer numerous reflections on the evolving state of politics in the late Victorian and Edwardian universities. The society's development foreshadowed the wider evolution of university politics in the Edwardian era. It represents a transformation from the more limited politics focused around the activities of dons, to the more participatory politics which embraced young people in the political sphere.**

Realm Act, and was later to be interned by the British government for urging against American intervention on Britain's side of the war.

By Michaelmas 1915, Cambridge was increasingly deserted as ever more young men went away to fight. What was left of the society resolved to plough on with 'at least one meeting a term'.<sup>92</sup> It made good on this pledge, holding several events over the next two terms, some of which were on relatively contentious issues – there was a meeting on 'voluntarism vs. conscription', and a closed (ticketed) meeting on 'the influence of German education on the war.' Yet discussion at such talks was reportedly growing less animated, and the scarcity of students made the First World War a difficult time for political societies, with no recorded wartime activity from the CU Fabian Society, while the Cambridge Union suspended its debates and elections between Easter 1916 and Easter 1919.

The final nail in the coffin was the death on 8 February 1916 of Professor John Edwin Nixon. Nixon had served as the society's treasurer since 1903, filling a seven-year vacuum created by Browning's dismissal. After two unsuccessful, largely absent interim treasurers, Nixon had transformed the society's finances from a deficit to a healthy balance, and had maintained a strong interest in its wellbeing throughout the Edwardian era. Without his sympathetic influence, and with many other CULC fellows such as Keynes called away from Cambridge for war work, there was no driving force left. The society held its last wartime meeting on 23 February 1916, with former government minister Earl Beauchamp speaking on 'Liberalism during the war and afterwards', before announcing on 1 March 1916 the suspension of the society for the remainder of the war.<sup>93</sup>

The first thirty years of Cambridge University Liberal Club thus offer numerous reflections on the evolving state of politics in the late Victorian and Edwardian universities. The society's development foreshadowed the wider evolution of university politics in the Edwardian era. It represents a transformation from the more limited politics focused around the activities of dons, to the more participatory politics which embraced young people in the political sphere. In stretching these boundaries, it is perhaps unsurprising that we find so many among this first generation of 'student' politicians to have gone on to exceptional careers, including Keynes, Maxse, Montagu and Russell. Broader issues such as the precise role of women, and the appropriate degree of politicisation in the war years, were all reflected in the society. It carved out a distinctive role in its electioneering for the constituencies of Cambridge city and Chesterton. A sign of its prominence can be found in the degree to which it was subject to satire by Cornford and others. Yet there were also shortcomings in its organisation, including the rapid turnover of personnel peculiar to any student organisation – a development which became increasingly apparent – with the move to

a student-dominated society after the marginalisation of Browning. Its gentlemen's-club-style organisation – particularly among its short-lived inner circle in the Political Circle – could be counter-productive. It was prone to the petty adolescent feuds and finger-pointing which are familiar to anyone who has ever been involved in student politics. And whilst its fortunes broadly ebbed and flowed with those of the Liberals nationally, it can be seen in the mid-Edwardian period to have been representative of one of the Liberal Party's renewed areas of strength, securing support from hitherto-untapped quarters.

*Dr Seth Alexander Thevoz is an Associate Member of Nuffield College, Oxford. His first book, Club Government, examining the political impact of London clubs from 1832 to 1868, is due out from I.B. Tauris in 2017.*

- 1 For the expanding literature on Victorian political clubs, see Matt Cole, 'The Liberal Echo Chamber', *Journal of Liberal History*, 90 (Spring 2016), pp. 6–13; Seth Alexander Thévoz, *Club Government* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
- 2 *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 15 May 1882, p. 4.
- 3 *Daily News*, 25 Nov. 1886, p. 5.
- 4 James Rattue, *Kissing Your Sister: A History of the Oxford University Liberal Club, 1913–93* (Oxford: Umbra, 1993), pp. 1–4. Contemporary newspapers suggest that the Palmerston Club was already in existence by 1878, and that the Russell Club was a later offshoot society founded c.1880. A merged 'Russell and Palmerston Club' was refounded by Jeremy Thorpe as a Liberal dining society in the early 1950s, but this was a separate foundation.
- 5 *The Times*, 1 Dec. 1885, p. 5; the comment was made in the context of an article on 'Political organisations: the university towns', which offered an overview and comparisons of the pre-CULC political dining societies.
- 6 *Eighty Club, Social Problems: Speech by R.B. Haldane Q.C. M.P. at Cambridge on Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> 1891, Sir Charles Russell Q.C. M.P. in the Chair* (London: Eighty Club, 1891), p. 39.
- 7 From 1852, the Peel Club was renamed the Glasgow University Conservative Club.
- 8 I refer to CULC as a society rather than a club throughout this article, as although it styled itself a 'club', Victorian clubs were largely defined by their premises, and as CULC possessed no permanent premises, it was more in the nature of a society.
- 9 Oscar Browning, *Memories of Sixty Years at Eton, Cambridge & Elsewhere* (London: Bodley Head, 1910), p. 253. Browning incorrectly recalls in the same passage 'I was to be the only "Don" belonging to the club', so the assertion that he was 'invited' may be treated with some scepticism.
- 10 This was a considerable snub, given that W. E. Gladstone came to Cambridge in 1887 anyway, to plant a tree in Newnham College, where his daughter was a fellow – see Sheila Fletcher, 'Helen Gladstone (1849–1925)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 11 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Edwin Montagu papers, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 10 June 1887; A list from 29 Apr. 1889 shows College Secretaries in place for Peterhouse, Pembroke, Caius, King's, Queens', St John's, Emmanuel, Sidney, and Downing colleges; meaning the society was not organised in Clare, Trinity Hall, Corpus, Christ's, Trinity, Jesus, St Catharine's, or Selwyn – although there were members and committee members at several of the latter colleges. At that meeting, an £8, 10s, 11d balance reported (and an accompanying balance sheet actually showing £12, 10s, 0d in surplus).
- 12 *Ibid.*, entry for 23 Jan. 1888.
- 13 *Ibid.*, entry for 12 Nov. 1888.
- 14 Edwin Montagu papers, Montagu MSS AS4/1/13, letter to Charles Trevelyan dated 21 Oct. 1895
- 15 *Ibid.*, entry for 11 May 1887.
- 16 *Ibid.*, entry for 26 Apr. 1894.
- 17 *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1890, p. 6, report of a speaker meeting with Sir Charles Russell.
- 18 Montagu MSS AS4/1/19 669 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter dated 10 May 1894.
- 19 Montagu MSS AS4/1/17 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter dated 16 May (no year cited, but it is fairly clear from the context that it is 1894).
- 20 Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Youth, 1874–1900* (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 233.
- 21 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 19 Nov. 1887.
- 22 *Ibid.*, entries for 12 and 16 Nov. 1888.
- 23 *Ibid.*, entry for 16 Nov. 1890.
- 24 *Ibid.*, entries for 16 Oct. 1890 and 16 Nov. 1890.
- 25 Montagu MSS AS4/1/13 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter to Charles Trevelyan dated 21 Oct. 1895.
- 26 Ian Anstruther, *Oscar Browning: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1983), p. 115.
- 27 Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Oscar Browning (1837–1923)', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 28 Anstruther, *Browning*, p. 171.
- 29 Percy Cradock, *Recollections of the Cambridge Union, 1815–1939* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1953) p. 89.
- 30 H. E. Wortham, *Victorian Eton and Cambridge; Being the Life and Times of Oscar Browning* (London: Arthur Baker, 1956 [second edition]), p. 254.
- 31 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – Entry for 5 Nov. 1890.
- 32 *Ibid.*, entries for 30 Jan. 1889, 29 Apr. 1889, 15 Oct. 1889, 5 Nov. 1889, 16 Nov. 1889, [undated] Mar. 1890, 21 Apr. 1890, 12 May 1890, 2 June 1890, 9 June 1890, 16 Nov. 1890, 22 Jan. 1891, (the minute book was lost for much of 1892) 6 Feb. 1893, 8 June 1893, 21 Oct. 1893, 16 Nov. 1893, 4 Dec. 1893, 20 Feb. 1894, 13 Mar. 1894, 26 Apr. 1894, 6 Dec. 1894, 19 Feb. 1895, 23 Jan. 1896, 5 May 1896, 26 May 1896, 26 Oct. 1896, 17 Nov. 1896.
- 33 *Ibid.*, entry for 16 Nov. 1888.
- 34 Letter from W. M. Crook to the *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Jan. [year undated, but apparently c.1960–2]. I am much indebted to Professor Peter Calvert for copying out the entire letter in longhand and keeping it all these years in his notes on CULC's history, and for his lending me these notes.
- 35 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 16 Nov. 1896.
- 36 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f. 46. National Library of Wales, entry for 6 June 1899.
- 37 *Ibid.*, entry for 6 June 1899, f. 44.
- 38 It should be noted that as Montagu was just about to graduate, and stayed on in Cambridge for a year to meet the society's residency requirement, he was not a student during his time in office – the distinction of first 'real' student president belonged to Michael McDonnell the following year.
- 39 *Ibid.*, entry for 31 Oct. 1897, f. 1.
- 40 See Michael Freedon (ed.), *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894–1924*: Camden Fourth Series, Volume 38 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1989). CULC alumni who became members of the Rainbow Circle included two Liberal (later Labour) MPs Charles Phillips Trevelyan and Noel Buxton, Liberal MP and journalist George Peabody Gooch, and Ramsey Macdonald's future private secretary Herbert Brough Usher.
- 41 See the intermittent use of the blackball throughout Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.
- 42 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, October 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, entry for

- 23 Feb. 1901, f. 78.
- 43 See Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, *passim*.
- 44 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f.48 National Library of Wales, entry for 13 Oct. 1897.
- 45 Ibid., Cambridge University Liberal Club, list of members – Michaelmas 1900, pasted into f. 69.
- 46 See Paul Readman, ‘The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900’, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), pp. 107–145, particularly for instances of patriotic campaigning in Cambridgeshire in 1900.
- 47 *Cambridge Evening News* report of an ‘At Home’ meeting of the society with Augustine Birrell MP, 24 Nov. 1900 (report undated), pasted into Cambridge University Liberal Club, list of members – Michaelmas 1900, in turn pasted into f. 71 of Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f. 91, National Library of Wales, entry for 5 Feb. 1902.
- 50 *Daily News*, 2 May 1895, p. 6.
- 51 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 12 Mar. 1895
- 52 Ibid., entries for 26 Feb. and 4 Mar. 1896.
- 53 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 2 Feb. 1889.
- 54 Peter Clarke, *Keynes: The Rise, Fall, and Return of the 20th Century’s Most Important Economist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) p. 35.
- 55 Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Volume One – Hopes Betrayed, 1883–1920* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 114.
- 56 Ibid., p. 264.
- 57 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – report for 1904–5. Please note that there are no folio numbers in the minute book after 1903.
- 58 Ibid., minutes of 1905 AGM. Undated, but c. May/June 1905 from the minutes’ position in the book.
- 59 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1906–7, signed by A. L. Hobhouse, c. June 1907.
- 60 Ibid., Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 24 Oct. 1913.
- 61 *Cambridge Daily News*, 3 Feb. 1908, p. 2.
- 62 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1909–10.
- 63 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1910–11.
- 64 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1911–12.
- 65 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1912–13 and 1913–4.
- 66 See George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable, 1936); Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London: Constable, 1966), especially pp. 15–134.
- 67 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Friday 23 Oct. 1908.
- 68 Ibid., minutes of the Special General Meeting, Monday 7 Dec. 1908.
- 69 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 70 Ibid., minutes of Wednesday 10 Feb. 1909.
- 71 Ibid., minutes of Wednesday 10 Feb. 1909.
- 72 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 73 Ibid., minutes of committee meeting on 4 Feb. 1910.
- 74 Cambridge University Pitt Club, founded in 1835. Although strictly speaking a social club, it has long had a conservative reputation, and in the Edwardian era was the closest thing to a social organisation for Conservative in Cambridge. Its political role, however, was nonexistent.
- 75 Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Memoirs of a Conservative: J. C. C. Davidson’s Memoirs and Papers, 1910–37* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), p. 7.
- 76 Gordon Johnson (ed.), *University Politics: F. M. Cornford’s Cambridge and his Advice to the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [critical edition]), pp. 95, 97.
- 77 Gilbert E. Jackson and Philip Vos (eds.), *The Cambridge Union Society Debates, April 1910–March 1911, reprinted from the ‘Gownsmen’* (London: J.M. Dent, 1911), p. 5.
- 78 Ibid., p. 17.
- 79 Ibid., p. 49.
- 80 Cradock, *Recollections of the Cambridge Union*, p. 83.
- 81 Ibid., p. 85.
- 82 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1910–1.
- 83 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1911–2.
- 84 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 85 ‘E.T.’ (ed.), *Keeling Letters and Recollections* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918), pp. 8–15.
- 86 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1913–4.
- 87 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1914–5.
- 88 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1914–5..
- 89 Ibid., CULC letter to all members, 11 Nov. 1914.
- 90 This issue is best dealt with in R. J. Q. Adams, *The Conscriptio Controversy in Great Britain 1900–18* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987).
- 91 Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell – Volume II, 1914–1944* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 47.
- 92 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 4 Dec. 1915.
- 93 For the date of this last meeting, and the date of CULC’s suspension, I am grateful to Peter Calvert for the loan of his notebook for his own history of CULC, which he began working on in the late 1950s, but which was never completed.

# Letters to the Editor

## Targeting

I am grateful for Mark Pack’s elucidation of national decision-making on targeting (*Journal of Liberal History* 90, Spring 2016). The table accompanying my article in the previous issue of the *Journal* showed the increases in the party’s national vote and seats won at general elections subsequent to 1997 but my

point was that targeting brought diminishing returns, as was clearly shown.

My main argument is that targeting in effect hollows out the party and prevents it profiting from a national move to the party, such as followed the ‘I agree with Nick’ moment and, indeed, the increase in membership following the