

Liberal History News

Summer 2020

Editorial

Welcome to the summer 2020 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*. As with the spring issue, we apologise for the late arrival of this issue, a consequence of the disruption to editing and printing schedules caused by the coronavirus epidemic. All being well, we should be back on schedule from the autumn issue, due out in September.

As the Liberal Democrats face their fourth leadership election in five years, this issue opens with the results of our traditional request to the candidates to tell us about their historical heroes, a series we have run since 1999. This year we have not only published their pieces but, together with party HQ, we organised an online history hustings, where Ed Davey and Layla Moran introduced their heroes, and discussed them and aspects of Liberal Democrat leadership with our interview panel. You can watch the history hustings at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DazZgfCxEtY>.

I hope you enjoy this article, and all the others, together with our archives report and book reviews – and stay safe and healthy.

Duncan Brack (Editor)

Gladstone and slavery

Journal of Liberal History readers will have noticed, in early June, the decision by the University of Liverpool to rename a building named after former prime minister William Gladstone due to his perceived links to the slave trade.

It is likely that we will return to this topic in future issues of the *Journal*, but in the mean time we reprint here the statement released by Gladstone's Library at Hawarden on 11 June.

Black lives matter: statement from Gladstone's Library

At the core of our being, we at Gladstone's Library believe that Black Lives Matter. We also believe that if it is the democratic will, after due process, to remove statues of William Gladstone, our founder, we would not stand in the way. Nor, we think, would Gladstone himself – who worked tirelessly on behalf of democratic change. This is why we believe that what matters is how we live today, our values, our democratic process and political involvement. William Gladstone whose politics were strikingly different to his Tory father's politics and values, was the first British politician to lead a left-leaning government and to institute dramatic democratic changes when he introduced the secret ballot, universal education and a foreign policy based on freedom and liberty and not the aggrandisement of Empire.

Gladstone's Library, and we should add the Gladstone family, have continued to uphold and promote those liberal values. As a Library we are building our programme around the Gladstonian themes of democracy, human rights and freedom of belief – and we do not mean by simply looking back at history but by reading 'the

signs of the times' and working for a more democratic, humane and tolerant society. The Library, aware of John Gladstone's plantation-owning past, a number of years ago instituted a scholarship for research into historical and contemporary slavery.

We have been asked a lot today what we think about the renaming of Gladstone Hall in Liverpool. In many ways this statement answers this; we have had no contact from the University recently but we read that it was a democratic decision; so, to us the decision seems right and proper. Gladstone stood for change and so do we.

William Gladstone's record of public office was one of almost unequalled service. He was the driving force behind the emergence of the Liberal party, he was a humanitarian, one could even celebrate him as one of the founders of the modern concept of human rights. He was passionate about education for all rather than just the elite. He was quick to defend the oppressed whether in Italy, Ireland, Bulgaria or Armenia. It is a career that is worth celebrating but we memorialise it best by being politically involved, humane and tolerant.

Of course, it is undeniable that William Ewart Gladstone's father, John Gladstone, in common with many successful British merchants in the early nineteenth century, owned land in the West Indies and South America that used slave-labour. He received £106,769 in compensation at the time of the abolition of slavery. William

On This Day . . .

Every day the History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three. To see them regularly, look at www.liberalhistory.org.uk or www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup or follow us at: [LibHistoryToday](https://twitter.com/LibHistoryToday).

June

30 June 1917: Death of Dadabhai Naoroji. He became the first Indian professor of mathematics and served as Prime Minister of Baroda in the 1870s and was three times President of the Indian National Congress. Naoroji first visited England in 1855 and returned in the early 1880s. He was chosen to fight Holborn for the Liberals in the general election of 1886. He lost but secured nomination for Central Finsbury and at the election of 1892 gained the seat from the Tories by five votes, becoming the first non-white person to be elected to parliament. Although he lost his seat in 1895 his influence both in the UK and India was and remains considerable.'

July

10 July 1765: George Grenville is forced to resign as Prime Minister. Grenville's relations with King George III, which were never good, collapsed in early 1765. The King blamed Grenville for riots in London and sought to replace the government but failed to find a candidate. Sensing the King's weakness Grenville imposed humiliating conditions on the King but in doing so turned George into an implacable foe. Less than a month later, with the help of his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, and the Whig grandee the Duke of Newcastle, George turned the tables on Grenville with the appointment of Newcastle's protegee the Marquess of Rockingham. Grenville left office with his reputation enhanced but the king's hatred meant that Grenville never held office again.

August

21 August 1946: Liberal Party headquarters announces that the party executive has adopted a plan to secure a Liberal majority at the next general election with 600 candidates backed by 600 active associations. The plan called for organised associations to create 'starter' associations in derelict seats, with March 1947 as the deadline for achieving this target. By the time of the Liberal Assembly of 1947 it was reported that over 500 active associations existed compared with only 200 eight months earlier.

himself received nothing. Yes, in 1833 William did speak in the Commons in favour of compensation for slave owners. It was his first speech in the Commons and he was still in thrall to his father. By 1850, he was a changed man and in Parliament he described slavery as 'by far the foulest crime that taints the history of mankind in any Christian or pagan country'. He had changed. Towards the end of his life he cited the abolition of slavery as one of the great political issues in which the masses had been right and the classes had been wrong. He thought it was a taint on national history and politics. His change was a move towards a profound commitment to liberty and perhaps this quote exemplifies his shift: 'I was brought up to hate and fear liberty. I came to love it. That is the secret of my whole career.'

Liberty today means counter-ing racism, sexism and intolerance wherever we see it. That is where our energy should be exerted. That would be truly Gladstonian.

At the Gladstone Library we can always get better. We remain absolutely committed to progress and education, and we will actively seek to improve everything that we do through democratic and open

conversation with our community in its widest sense.

Peter Francis & Charlie Gladstone

Entrance to the Roscoe and Gladstone Halls at the University of Liverpool.

