

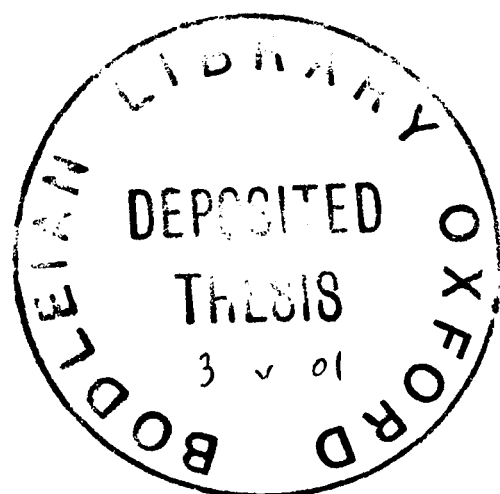
The Grass-roots Organisation of the Liberal Party 1945–64

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Abstract

Studies of the survival and revival of the Liberal Party after 1945 have focused on the Party's strength in the UK's Celtic fringe, its efficacy as a vehicle for protest voting, and the role played by the Party's leaders, particularly Jo Grimond. The reasons why the Liberal Party's constituency associations continued in being and activists continued to be recruited to the Party after a series of disastrous general election results, and the factors explaining the Party's revival in local government have, so far, been overlooked.

This thesis draws on a number of new sources of information, including the records of Liberal constituency and district associations and interviews with ordinary Liberal activists from the 1945–64 period, to provide new perspectives on the survival and revival of the Party. It shows how the independence and self-sufficiency of Liberal associations, the recruitment of Liberal activists during the 1945–50 period, and the Party's strength in local government in Yorkshire and north west England were important reasons for the Party's survival.

A new wave of recruitment after 1955, inspired by the leadership of Grimond and the new policies he and others devised and popularised, facilitated the Liberal revival, but a key factor previously unidentified was the development of early forms of community politics by Liberal activists in a number of towns and cities in England and Scotland. Decisions by activists to concentrate on local elections led to an explosion in the number of Liberal councillors, particularly in suburban areas, and drew more activists into the Party. This change in the Party's strategy, which has influenced the development of Liberal politics

since 1964, was derived from grass-roots activists rather than the Liberal leadership, although the Party's Local Government Department had an important role to play after 1960.

I. Introduction

The Liberal Party after 1945

The general election of 1945 was a bitter disappointment to the hierarchy of the Liberal Party, which had felt that the Party could make substantial progress based on the intellectual input of Beveridge and Keynes, both noted Liberals.¹ However, it was the Labour, rather than Liberal, Party which was to make sweeping gains at the election, leaving the latter with only twelve MPs. From this weak foundation, the Party continued to decline, and more than twenty years were to elapse before twelve Liberals would again be returned to the same Parliament.

Steed has argued that the 1945 general election heralded the Liberal Party's later revival and that there was "a significant increase in the willingness of people to vote Liberal in a substantial number of constituencies".² In fact, a detailed analysis of the Liberal Party's performance at constituency level in 1945 shows that the election results were a severe blow to the Party's prospects. Liberal candidates fared particularly badly in those three-cornered contests in which the Liberal vote was above average in 1935. Also, the number of straight fights enjoyed by Liberal candidates against one of the major parties decreased from 31 in 1935 to eleven in 1945. As a result, the Liberals finished first or second in just 36 constituencies in 1945, compared to 83 in 1935. Contrary to Steed's claim, Liberal

¹ Shields Gazette, 6 Jul 45. Liberal Party headquarters announced that they expected to win 80 to 100 seats, after the bulk of the nation's votes had been cast

² M. Steed, "The Liberal Performance in 1945" (Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter, No. 11, Jun 96) p9

candidates fared worse in those constituencies whose populations had increased most rapidly between 1935 and 1945 compared to those seats where the size of the electorate had grown slightly or fallen during that period. Thus, the 1945 election left the Liberal Party with a damaging legacy. The Liberals polled around one-fifth of the vote in the vast majority of the constituencies they fought which, under the first past the post electoral system, undermined the party's electoral credibility in all but a handful of seats. After 1945 the "wasted vote" argument was commonly and effectively used against Liberals throughout the country.³

The Liberal Party's decline after 1945 was severe. The 'broad front' strategy employed in the 1950 general election, when the party resorted to advertising in the national press for candidates,⁴ failed to arrest the decline — only nine MPs were elected; the Liberal share of the vote per candidate fell from 18.6 per cent in 1945 to 11.8 per cent. The number of Liberal candidatures subsequently collapsed, to only 109 in 1951 and 110 in 1955. The Party's national share of the vote fell below three per cent and its parliamentary representation dropped to an all-time low of five in 1957: Jo Grimond, in Orkney and Shetland, was the only one of those MPs to have defeated both major parties in the 1955 general election. There seemed little prospect of this dire parliamentary position improving. The Party was second in only eleven seats in both 1951 and 1955, and these near misses were often a reflection of the support built up for a former Liberal MP rather than a sign of organisational vitality. Parliamentary by-elections at this time were of little comfort to the Liberal Party. Fewer seats changed hands at by-elections during this period than is the

³ For a detailed analysis of the 1945 election results see M. Egan, "1945 and all that ..." (Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter, No. 15, Jun 97) pp8–12

⁴ J. S. Rasmussen, The Liberal Party: A Study of Retrenchment and Revival (Constable, 1965) p96

case today, and the Liberal Party failed to make a single gain in a by-election between 1929 and 1958.

At the municipal level, the Liberal Party's weak position is illustrated in Table 1.⁵ By 1956, when the number of Liberal borough councillors reached its nadir, there were only around 500 Liberal councillors in the whole country. Many of those were aldermen, elected by their fellow councillors rather than by the electorate, or owed their seats to electoral arrangements with, or the local weakness of, one of the main parties. Even by 1963, when the number of Liberal councillors reached a post-war peak, there were fewer Liberal borough councillors than in 1938.

⁵ See pp242–63 and 323–27 for a more detailed analysis of the Liberal Party's local government position during the 1945–64 period

Table 1: Liberal Councillors⁶

Year	Liberal councillors in English and Welsh boroughs	Total councillors in English and Welsh boroughs	Liberal councillors in Scottish burghs and counties	Total councillors in Scottish burghs and counties	Liberal councillors in London boroughs ⁷	Total councillors in London boroughs	Liberal county councillors in England and Wales	Total county councillors in England and Wales
1945	678 ⁸	13,195	0	4,261	0	1,505	73 ⁹	5,392
1956	292	13,571	2	4,270	0	1,505	74 ¹⁰	5,392
1963	967	13,563	14	4,300	12 ¹¹	1,505	87	5,392
1999 ¹²	3,523 ¹³	16,930	130 ¹⁴	1,198	300	2,069	488	2,203

The number of Liberal associations (LAs) affiliated to the national party fluctuated considerably during this period. A post-war peak of 395 was reached in 1950, but the number of LAs dipped below 300 in 1955.¹⁵ 78 constituencies were left uncontested by the Liberal Party in parliamentary elections between 1945 and 1964; a further six were only

⁶ All figures taken from The Times, except where otherwise stated

⁷ Excluding the Corporation of the City of London

⁸ The Times did not publish all borough council election results every year and its results coverage was poor prior to 1949. Thus this figure has been arrived at by comparing the limited number of results published in 1945 with the full set of 1949 results. This probably underestimates the number of Liberal councillors in boroughs in 1945

⁹ After 1949 county council elections. The Times only reported results from five counties in full in 1946

¹⁰ After 1952 county council elections. The Times only reported results from two counties in full in 1955. The Municipal Year Book, 1957, suggested that there were only 55 Liberal county councillors in 1956

¹¹ From the Municipal Year Book, 1964

¹² All 1999 figures taken from Municipal Year Book 2000

¹³ Includes metropolitan boroughs outside London, non-metropolitan boroughs, district councils, and unitary authorities

¹⁴ Unitary authority councillors

¹⁵ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp15, 20 and Annual Report and Accounts (LPO, 1951). There had been only 183 affiliated LAs in 1936 — R. M. Sommer, “The Organisation of the Liberal Party 1936–60” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1962) p94

contested at by-elections during this period.¹⁶ There is little published evidence concerning the membership or income of the local associations.¹⁷ At a national level, however, the Party was reliant on donations, especially from the Liberal Assembly, to maintain itself, and money was not usually available to allow the national party to provide direct assistance to local associations.

The identification of the key factors explaining the Liberal Party's ability to survive this seemingly unremitting decline has been successfully undertaken by Stevenson.¹⁸ Paradoxically, it was the Party's weakness, especially at parliamentary level, which ensured its survival as an independent electoral force. Both major parties made appeals to former Liberal voters to back them on the grounds that they had inherited and were carrying forward the Liberal tradition. The Conservatives, under Churchill, went furthest, offering Clement Davies a seat in the Cabinet in 1951 and also allowing the Liberals free runs against Labour in a handful of seats throughout the decade. These free runs, in Bolton, Huddersfield, and in Wales, ensured that the Liberals retained a presence in Parliament. Without pacts, the Party might have been reduced to just two MPs after 1951,¹⁹ which may

¹⁶ Excludes Northern Ireland constituencies. The majority of these constituencies were located in the coal-mining districts of south Wales, north east England, the West Riding of Yorkshire, south Lancashire, Cumberland, Fife, Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, the east Midlands and Staffordshire. The list includes Glasgow Govan and Ashfield, which succeeded the Glasgow Tradeston and Broxbourne seats after the 1955 boundaries review, Sheffield Park which incorporated the Sheffield Neepsend seat at the same time, and Cardiff West which succeeded the Llandaff and Barry constituency after the 1948 review

¹⁷ The Liberal Party's membership was estimated at 76,000 in 1953 after an investigation by Frank Byers — M. Baines, "Survival of the British Liberal Party 1932–59" (unpublished D. Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1989) p75. The "Call to Action" Campaign of 1961 estimated the Party's membership at 182,200 in September 1961 and 243,600 by December 1961. All of these and subsequent estimates were based upon information put forward by the Liberal associations which were frequently subject to exaggeration

¹⁸ J. Stevenson, Third Party Politics since 1945 (Blackwell, 1993)

¹⁹ Orkney and Shetland was safely Liberal after 1950, and the party would have had a better than even chance of holding onto Montgomery in a three-cornered fight

have presaged its development into “a political society, devoted to finding, working out and promoting certain ideas”.²⁰ A national arrangement would undoubtedly have seen the Liberal Party devoured by the Conservatives, however, in the same way as the Liberal Unionists and National Liberals had disappeared before them. That the Conservatives did not seek this objective was proof of the weak electoral position of the Liberals at this time and the decentralised nature of the Party. Liberal headquarters could not have prevailed upon individual associations to coordinate their activities with another party. For the Conservatives, the price of destroying the Liberals was too great, given the limited nature of the reward on offer.

Furthermore, the Liberal Party’s position as the third force in British politics was not credibly threatened during this period. The remaining National Liberals and the Ulster Unionists generally took the Conservative whip in the House of Commons; nationalism was yet to emerge as an electoral force; Communism suffered at the hands of the electoral system, and waned during the 1950s; groups which had attracted support in previous decades — Common Wealth, the British Union of Fascists, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) — had all faded. The Liberal Party remained the only national organisation represented in Parliament which opposed the two major parties of government and could provide an alternative to them, if and when the electorate turned against them both. This proved especially important as the 1950s drew to a close, and each major party was affected by crises and tensions which harmed the liberal credentials they had previously cultivated.

²⁰ From the Observer, quoted in Baines, “Survival of the British Liberal Party”, p72. The suggestion was also made by the Economist, 4 Mar 50, p461

The revival of the Liberal Party after its mid-1950s nadir was in some respects limited. In 1964, the Liberal share of the vote per candidate was only 18.5 per cent, less than in 1945, although with 59 more Liberal candidates standing. Only nine Liberal MPs were elected that year, the same as in the *débaîcle* of 1950. The number of LAs affiliated to the Liberal Party Organisation (LPO) reached 478 in 1962, leaving 150 constituencies without a Liberal association even in the aftermath of the Orpington by-election.²¹

The Party was in a significantly better state in 1964 than in 1945, however, if other indicators are examined. The Liberal parliamentary party had been weaned off its dependence on deals and pacts with other parties. All the Party's MPs in 1964 had won their seats in contests against the two main parties. The Party polled three million votes, the largest total since 1929. It had finally won a by-election, in 1958, and followed it up in 1962 with the overthrow of a 14,000 Tory majority in Orpington which suggested that the Party might break out of the confines of its Celtic fringe electoral base. In the wake of this triumph the Party claimed a huge boost in membership and income. At the same time as the Liberal Party's parliamentary prospects improved, so too did its municipal performance revive. From 1955 onwards, the Liberal Party began to make net gains in local elections, and these gains were substantial during the early 1960s. By 1964, the Liberal Party had regained the ground it had lost during the lean years of the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Liberal supporters could take a more rosy view of the future than fifteen years previously.

²¹ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 26 Jan 63

Explanations for the Survival and Revival of the Liberal Party

Several writers have addressed the question of why the Liberal Party did not disappear after the disastrous general election results of 1945 and 1950, which confirmed that the Party had been pushed to the sidelines of British politics, and why it subsequently revived. Their explanations, which are summarised below, have tended to focus on the leadership of the Liberal Party, the strategies it employed, the Liberal Party's policies, and the electoral appeal of the Party. Important though many of these factors undoubtedly were, there has, until now, been insufficient attention paid to the Liberal Party's activists, its grass-roots institutions, and the Party's role in local politics during the period from 1945–64.

THE CELTIC FRINGE

A common explanation for the survival of the Liberal Party, and for the nature of its revival in the parliamentary elections of the mid-1960s, is that it maintained and increased its appeal to the electors of the more remote parts of the United Kingdom — particularly the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, rural Wales, and south west England.²² The Liberal Party was better able to win parliamentary seats in the Celtic fringe areas of the United Kingdom than elsewhere. Only six out of 23 seats, discounting the Welsh University seat, held between 1945 and 1964 were not situated in those areas,²³ and most of the Party's most promising prospects were also to be found in the Celtic fringe.

²² Prominent Liberals have been amongst those who have tended to emphasise the importance of the Celtic fringe to the party. Harry Cowie referred to the "Celtic twilight nature of the Liberals' appeal" in his appendix to Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p278

²³ Three English rural seats, North Cumberland, Eye and Buckrose, Huddersfield West and Bolton West, in both of which the Liberal Party enjoyed free runs against Labour, and Orpington

Three reasons have been proposed to explain the continuing appeal of the Liberal Party in Britain's Celtic fringe. Firstly, it has been argued that the religious issues which shaped the British political system before 1918 remained influential after 1945 in the Celtic fringe, from which the Liberal Party gleaned some benefit. Anecdotal evidence of the continuing links between nonconformity and the Liberal Party after 1945 abounds.²⁴ Nevertheless, only after the 1964 election did the Party hold a majority of seats in one part of the Celtic fringe, the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Elsewhere it was in continual decline in rural Wales and failed to win a single seat in south west England in the elections of 1950, 1951 and 1955. The Liberal Party's link with nonconformity was also not enough to prevent Liberal associations in areas of traditional Methodist strength, such as County Durham, from disappearing altogether during the inter-war years.

Secondly, a related argument is that the Liberal Party remained strong in isolated communities whose remoteness somehow preserved them from the political changes occurring in the rest of the country. Birch's study of Glossop, where the Liberal Party had a significant local government presence after 1945, suggested that the Party's ability to tap old reservoirs of support while claiming to protect the local population and culture from vested interests and the State explained Liberal voting. Perhaps crucially, the town possessed a very stable population structure — 81 per cent having been born in the town or having lived there for at least 20 years.²⁵ This facilitated the maintenance of a political system founded upon the landowning and mill-owning families of the previous century. A

²⁴ P. J. Madgwick, N. Griffiths and V. Walker, The Politics of Rural Wales (Hutchinson, 1973) p70 claimed that nonconformist ministers presided over open polling in some Cardiganshire villages into the 1950s. D. E. Butler and A. S. King, British General Election of 1966 (Macmillan, 1966) pp200–1, p233 contains similar anecdotal evidence relating to the west country. See also P. Payton, The Making of Modern Cornwall (Dyllansow Truran, 1992) p228

²⁵ A. H. Birch, Small Town Politics (OUP, 1959) p38

similar stability might be expected in the Celtic fringe, and in towns such as Rochdale and Huddersfield, which were neither Celtic nor fringe, but in which the Liberals remained relatively strong after 1945.

Thirdly, Cyr has argued that an important element in the revival of the Liberal Party was its campaigns for devolution and regional government in order to counter the centralisation of the State in Whitehall. The Party produced a number of regional plans in the mid-1960s,²⁶ and featured regional government in its 1964 election manifesto, which may have influenced the Party's successes in the Scottish Highlands in the 1964 and 1966 general elections.²⁷ Such policies were not always popular in the Celtic fringe, however. There is evidence that in Cardiganshire many Liberal supporters perceived the Rural Development Board suggested by the Labour government in 1966, which was similar to the schemes previously proposed by the Liberal Party, as an attack on Welsh culture.²⁸

The Liberal Party cannot be pigeon-holed as a party purely of the Celtic fringe during the 1945–64 period. Its most famous moment came in 1962 when Eric Lubbock won a parliamentary by-election in Orpington, an English suburban constituency bearing none of the traits of the Celtic fringe.²⁹ In other by-elections after 1954 and in the 1964 general election, the Liberals polled reasonably well in a range of suburban and rural constituencies

²⁶ "A Plan for the North East", North East Liberal Association, 1964, "Highland Development" Scottish Liberal Party, 1964, "Prospect Oxfordshire", Banbury Liberal Association, 1964, and "East Anglia: a Liberal plan", Eastern Counties Liberal Federation, 1965

²⁷ H. Cowie in Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party*, pp277–9; see also J. D. Lees, "Aspects of Third Party Campaigning in the 1964 General Election" (*Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 1) pp84, 86

²⁸ Madgwick, Griffiths and Walker, *Rural Wales*, p171

²⁹ Interestingly, in the light of the Orpington victory, more emphasis was placed by the LPO in early 1962 on the Lincoln by-election, which took place the week before the Orpington poll, because it was a Labour-held seat — LPO Organising Committee, *Minutes*, 6 Feb 62, 19 Feb 62

in England which lacked Liberal or nonconformist traditions. The Party's strength in local government, as will be shown later, was in English towns and suburbs, not in the Celtic fringe. The Liberals' traditional appeal to the Celtic fringe was an important explanation of the Party's survival, but other more complex and ultimately more significant factors were at work.

THE PROTEST VOTE

Some have argued that the Liberal Party's role in British politics was to act as a repository for the votes of those temporarily disaffected by the government party, for which they would normally vote, but who felt unable to vote for the major opposition party. Evans, for example, said in 1974 that, "the Liberals provided a useful vehicle for protest against Conservatives in non-industrial areas".³⁰ In relation to local government politics, Grant described the Liberal Party as "a useful vehicle of protest combining an absence of local 'strings' with the possibility of national assistance".³¹ Sell has described the Liberal revival of the late 1950s as being "based on protest rather than conviction".³²

There is some evidence to support this hypothesis. Firstly, the Liberal Party's support, at least in the 1960s, was extremely volatile. Two-thirds of those who said they would vote Liberal in 1963 failed to do so in 1964; and 60 per cent of Liberal voters in 1964 had not

³⁰ P. Evans, The Protest Virus (Pitman Publishing, 1974) p87

³¹ W. Grant, Independent Local Politics in England and Wales (Saxon House, 1977) p59

³² G. Sell, "Liberal Revival: Jo Grimond and the Politics of British Liberalism 1956–67" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1997) p89

expressed such a preference in 1963.³³ The Liberal Party managed to retain only 52 per cent of its vote between the general elections of 1964 and 1966, and less than one per cent of the electorate voted Liberal in both the general elections of 1959 and 1970.³⁴ The volatility of the Liberal Party's support was also picked up by opinion polls. According to Gallup, between six and thirteen per cent of the electorate intended to vote Liberal "if there was a general election tomorrow" in 93 of the 99 monthly surveys undertaken between 1945 and 1955 and in 47 of the 56 monthly surveys between 1956 and 1960, but in only nineteen of the 48 surveys between 1961 and 1964. In the later period the difference between the largest monthly recording of the proportion of the electorate intending to vote Liberal and the smallest was eighteen per cent, compared to fourteen per cent between 1956 and 1960 and thirteen per cent between 1945 and 1955.³⁵

Secondly, after 1955 the Liberal Party increasingly focused on contesting parliamentary by-elections, which provided opportunities for voters to express dissatisfaction with the government. Out of 110 contests between 1955 and 1964, twelve seats changed hands. During the 1955–59 period eighteen per cent of by-elections involved at least one party's vote share changing by more than fifteen per cent; in the next Parliament, such a vote change occurred in 43 per cent of by-elections. The Liberal Party contested 68 out of 110 by-elections between 1955 and 1964, compared to only 22 out of 103 in the previous

³³ D. E. Butler and D. Stokes, Political Change in Britain (Macmillan, 1969) p315

³⁴ J. Alt, I. Crewe and B. Sarlvik, "Angels in Plastic: the Liberal Surge in 1974" (Political Studies, Vol. 25) p345, from D. E. Butler and D. E. Stokes, Political Change in Britain (Macmillan, 1974). The average retention of votes from one election to the next for the major parties was around 70–80%. The Liberal Party suffered from a particular disadvantage in that the number and distribution of Liberal candidates changed from one election to another

³⁵ This and further references to Gallup opinion polls taken from D. E. and G. Butler, Twentieth-Century British Political Facts 1900–2000 (Macmillan, Eighth Edition, 2000) pp265–70

decade. Although the number of seats the Liberal Party contested increased, the average share of the Liberal vote in by-election contests rose dramatically, from 10.5 per cent between 1945 and 1955 to 24.1 per cent between 1955 and 1964.

The Liberal Party did not act as a half-way house for those making a long-term switch from the Conservatives to Labour or vice versa — only a tiny minority of voters used the party in that way.³⁶ Much of the volatility in Liberal support can be attributed to supporters of the two major parties switching to the Liberals to express their dissatisfaction with their party, and then switching back again, particularly towards a general election.

There is little evidence to suggest that the Liberal Party was used to express short-term political protest in by-elections between 1945 and 1955. In the three Parliaments of this period, the Liberal Party stood in fewer than one in four by-elections, and managed to surpass 30 per cent of the vote on only one occasion — at Inverness in 1954. On average, Liberal candidates secured around one-eighth of the popular vote. In only one in ten contests did any party's share of the vote change by more than fifteen per cent and only three seats changed hands, none involving Liberals.³⁷ Gallup polls recorded that at no time between 1945 and 1955 did more than fifteen per cent of the electorate profess a Liberal voting intention. The Liberal Party was so weak and so lacking in electoral credibility at this time that it was futile for electors to vote Liberal in order to register a protest against

³⁶ Of those switching from the Conservatives to the Liberals between 1963 and 1964, and changing again, 94 per cent switched back to the Conservatives; in the case of switchers from Labour, all those in the sample switched back to Labour. Butler and Stokes, Political Change (1974) p274

³⁷ P. Norris, British By-elections (Clarendon, 1990) pp124–5. The seats were English Universities (Conservative gain from Independent 1946), Scottish Universities (Conservative gain from Independent Labour 1946) and Sunderland South (Conservative gain from Labour 1953)

the government of the day. The survival of the Liberal Party did not depend on the Party's efficacy as a 'safe house' for protest votes.

Protest voting was commonly given as the explanation for the performance of the Liberal Party in by-elections and in opinion polls during the 1955–64 period, and the Liberal victory in the Orpington by-election in 1962 was attributed to protest voting by the LPO's Secretary, Patrick Kemmis, in an internal memorandum.³⁸ Analyses of the reasons for the Orpington result have emphasised local and organisational factors, however, and it is significant that the Liberals held the seat for eight years.³⁹ The protest vote thesis also fails to deal adequately with by-elections during this period where Liberal candidates took votes from Labour.⁴⁰ The main beneficiaries of the Conservatives' mid-term unpopularity in both the 1955 and 1959 Parliaments was the Labour Party, not the Liberals. Peaks in Liberal opinion poll ratings all coincided with periods of exceptional Conservative unpopularity, but Labour was always far ahead of the Liberals.⁴¹ During 1963, as the Liberal showing in the polls slowly declined, it was Labour which gained from the government's weakness.

A related hypothesis is that the Liberal Party was the British equivalent of the Poujadist movement, which arose in France in the mid-1950s and which, Wright argued, was "against the state, against Paris, parliament, big business, industrialisation, French

³⁸ LPO Organising Committee Papers, memorandum OC62/17, "Post Orpington", LSE file 5/2, p44

³⁹ D. Newby, The Orpington Story (Prism Publications, 1963); also LPO Organising Committee Papers, "Orpington By-Election Survey: Progress Report", T. Joyce, 11 April 1962, LSE file 5/2, p52

⁴⁰ For example Weston-super-Mare in 1958 and Deptford in 1963

⁴¹ In September 1957 (Lab 52%, Con 33%, Lib 14%), May 1958 (Lab 47%, Con 34%, Lib 19%), August and December 1961 (Lab 47%, Con 38%, Lib 17%) and April–June 1962 (Lab 39–41%, Con 33–35%, Lib 25%)

withdrawal from Algeria and (especially) taxes”.⁴² Tregidga, in his study of liberalism in south west England, has highlighted ways in which the Liberal Party appealed to the “small man” and encouraged voters to register a protest against the government and the political system by voting Liberal, even noting comparisons between the Liberals’ torchlight parade in Bideford after Jeremy Thorpe won Devon North in 1959 and fascist demonstrations.⁴³ He concluded that the growing discontent of the petit bourgeoisie was “probably the main reason for the Party’s by-election revival” and “connected the discontent of the small farmers with the wider need for regional development”.⁴⁴

Although the Liberal Party did attract some support from those solely wishing to register a protest against the party they normally backed, Liberal activists were not motivated in this way, as Chapter five will show. Indeed, it is not plausible to argue that political activists would have organised and worked for a political party which was primarily concerned with appealing to transient groups of electors unhappy with the government’s conduct of the main issue of the day, nor is it likely that such a party could have lasted very long, as the history of the Poujadist movement shows. Liberals saw themselves as inheritors of a long tradition of political thought and of the political tradition of Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George. As Sell has argued, the Liberal Party thought of itself as a party of government, not protest.⁴⁵

⁴² V. Wright, The Government and Politics of France (Routledge, Third Edition, 1992) p169

⁴³ G. H. Tregidga, “The Liberal Party in South West England 1929–59” (unpublished PhD thesis, Exeter University, 1995) p300; a similar comparison was noted by W. Wallace, “The Liberal Revival 1955–66” (unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1968) p49

⁴⁴ Tregidga, “Liberal Party in South West England”, p305

⁴⁵ Sell, “Jo Grimond”, p166

Cyr has explained the revival of the Liberal Party from the late 1950s onwards in terms of its ability to attract elements of the electorate divorced from the benefits of centralised economic planning or the welfare state because of their location or economic status.⁴⁶ He examined the Liberal Party's role in terms of its long-standing antipathy to collectivism. This, he argued, made the Party receptive to the complaints of those in the minority, those overlooked by impersonal power structures, local losers in national planning decisions, and people ignored by a supposedly universal benefit system. By basing liberalism on localism and the needs of the very poor, the Liberal Party could exploit the faults of modern political administration.

Cyr admits that this is an incomplete characterisation of the Liberal revival. He gives no explanation of why the disadvantages of centralised bureaucracy began to become evident in the mid-1950s, helping to spark Liberal revival, or why the Party only became aware and able to benefit from them then. No account is given by Cyr of disaffection with welfare provision prior to the 1950s, for example the question of whether recipients' antipathy to the manner in which unemployment relief was given in the 1930s had an impact on voting behaviour.

The Liberal Party did not openly pitch its message at the very poor or, as we have seen, the peripheral regions. The commitment of the pre-1918 Liberal Party to voluntarism rather

⁴⁶ A. Cyr, Liberal Politics in Britain (Transaction Books, 1977) and see above. Boyd gave a similar reason for the survival of the Liberal Party — F. Boyd, British Politics in Transition 1945–63 (Pall Mall Press, 1965) p97

than collectivism was rarely apparent in party policy after 1945. Even if the Party had opposed collectivist welfare provision and attracted the support of the poorest social groups as a result, this would not have gained it many parliamentary seats, given their relatively small numbers and geographical spread. It is noticeable that Liberal support in the 1960s tended to be evenly spread across the social classes, excepting the lowest classes — groups V and VI in Butler and Stokes' classification — which showed the lowest levels of Liberal support.⁴⁷ This does not suggest that those alienated by the modern welfare state were lending much support to the Liberal Party at that time.

The Cyr thesis is flawed but it provides one possible factor in the Liberal revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It could be used to explain the large number of regional plans that the Party produced during the 1960s and which may have had a positive influence on the Liberal vote in certain constituencies. If Cyr's theory can be applied to local government then it fits well with the rise of community politics, whereby Liberals aimed to overcome local bureaucracies through campaigning on issues of concern to local residents. The obvious failure of the Party to capitalise on dissatisfaction with centralisation or universality suggests that again this thesis is by no means the full story.

Liberals and Trade Unions

The class consciousness of Liberal activists was noted before 1914 and has been cited as a reason explaining the development of a party which aimed to secure the election of working class candidates to Parliament. John Lovell has written that, although at the turn

⁴⁷ Butler and Stokes, Political Change (1969) pp69, 79

of the twentieth century “the majority of trade union leaders were Liberal in political outlook” and “sympathy [was] shown by the [Liberal] Party’s leaders” to the union movement, the Liberal Party’s “local associations in the constituencies remained unresponsive to labour’s claims and persistently refused to adopt trade unionists as candidates”.⁴⁸ The Liberal Governments of 1906 and 1910 reversed the Taff Vale and Osborne judgements, which were injurious to the trade unionist cause, but not without facing some opposition from Liberals, and the Liberal leadership was bitterly divided in its attitude to the General Strike of 1926.⁴⁹ During the period from 1945 to 1964, trade union reforms were prominent in Liberal election manifestoes. The Liberals’ 1950 election manifesto, for instance, argued for “a new charter ... to safeguard the rights of the individual trade unionist” and for trade unionists to contract into, rather than out of, the unions’ political levy.⁵⁰

Cyr has argued that the Party owed its survival to a “small but active middle-class culture which intellectually rejects class appeals and class based political conflict”.⁵¹ This group remained out of the Labour Party precisely because of its — in their view — immoral, illiberal and economically damaging link with the labour movement. This perception of the Liberal Party has been postulated without being rigorously tested. In interviews conducted

⁴⁸ J. Lovell in B. Pimlott and C. Cook (eds.), Trade Unions in British Politics: The First 250 Years (Longman, Second Edition, 1991) p39

⁴⁹ On the Taff Vale and Osborne cases see M. Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics 1867–1939 (Blackwell, 1982) pp108, 156–57; on the General Strike see T. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–35 (Collins, 1966) pp329–36

⁵⁰ Guide to the House of Commons (The Times, 1950) p299; and see Campaign Facts (Manchester Regional Young Liberal Organisation, 1959) pp6, 30–1; for a good example of the Liberal attitude to trade unionism see the speech by Frank Byers on a Liberal amendment to the Debate on the Address, Official Report of the House of Commons, 19 November 1946, from c696

⁵¹ Cyr, Liberal Politics, p250

for this thesis, respondents were invited to discuss their attitude towards trade unionism and their responses are discussed in Chapter five. It would be expected that if trade unionism were a particularly potent influence on Liberal membership then a significant proportion of Liberals would have joined the Party as a result of their dissatisfaction with Labour. Furthermore, any waves of Liberal recruitment could be linked to political events involving the trade union movement, including the clause IV debate within the Labour Party in 1960.

LEADERS

The senior figures in the Liberal Party had a particularly significant role to play in guiding the fortunes of the Party during its weakest periods. They sought to increase the Party's profile, in Parliament, in the media, and in the country at large, particularly during general elections; they toured LAs and Liberal area federations to boost morale and communicate policy and strategy messages to the party workers; and they were continuously questioned about the future of the Party, and grappled with the dilemma of how it could continue to survive independently of the two main parties.⁵² The burden on the party leader was particularly intense. Consequently, the Liberal Party's leaders have figured highly in explanations of why the Party survived and revived. Douglas has emphasised the Liberal Party's debt to the "inspiring leadership" of Clement Davies, Frank Byers, and Philip Fothergill, and has described Fothergill, Liberal Party President, Treasurer, and Chairman of the Executive Committee during the 1950s, as "the most powerful single force for cohesion in the Liberal Party for the last dozen years of his life".⁵³ Sommer concluded that

⁵² For example see M. Pottle (ed.), Daring to Hope: the Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1946–69 (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000) pp26–7, 35, 41, 77–9, 85–9, 98–105

⁵³ R. Douglas, The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970 (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971) pp255, 269

one of the two reasons the Liberal Party did not cease to exist was “the presence of people like Lord Samuel and the Rt. Hon. Isaac Foot, who saw that there would be a distinctive role for the Party in the protection of the rights of the individual against the encroachments of the ever-growing state”.⁵⁴ Sell considered that “Grimond’s leadership style was an important factor not only in contributing to the Liberal revival but also for failing to sustain it”.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Students of the Liberal Party have tended to use a combination of the factors outlined above to explain the survival and revival of the Party during the 1945–64 period. Tregidga, referring to south west England, argued that the Liberals’ survival was due to the Party’s traditional, nonconformist vote and that its revival resulted from its appeal to “feelings of neglect” by central government.⁵⁶ Wallace outlined a range of factors to explain the Party’s revival after 1955, including the strategic decisions taken by Grimond, the Party’s ability to attract activists because of the plausibility of its strategic aims and its preoccupation with policy, and the major parties’ inability to appeal to the whole of the electorate between them.⁵⁷ Baines placed emphasis on the Party’s traditional vote and the strategy of the Conservative Party towards the Liberals to explain the Liberal Party’s survival.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Sommer, “Organisation of the Liberal Party”, pp2–3; the other factor was the Party’s commitment to free trade

⁵⁵ Sell, “Jo Grimond”, p2

⁵⁶ Tregidga, “Liberal Party in South West England”, pp330–2

⁵⁷ Wallace, “Liberal Revival”, pp409–14

⁵⁸ Baines, “Survival of the British Liberal Party”, p97

All of these explanations rest upon there being Liberal associations in place to recruit Liberal members and adopt and work for parliamentary candidates during the 1945–64 period. The Liberal Party’s traditional vote would not have enabled the Party to survive the dark years after 1945 if it had not been mobilised at election times, at least in some constituencies. The Liberal Party could not have been used as an effective vehicle for protest if it did not exist in the constituencies. The Liberal leadership would have been entirely ineffective if there had been no Liberal Party in the country to lead.

Some writers have acknowledged the importance of the Liberal Party’s grass-roots, particularly in relation to local government. Baines acknowledged that the structure of the Liberal Party facilitated its survival.⁵⁹ Wallace considered that the Party’s local organisation enabled it to take advantage of opportunities during the period of revival after 1955, but pointed to organisational deficiencies which held the Party back, a theme taken up by Douglas.⁶⁰ Sell concluded that “the most prominent area of Liberal electoral revival was in local government” but devoted just three pages to an analysis of this issue.⁶¹ Sommer described LAs in the 1930s, where they existed, as “so completely befuddled and confused by the lack of coordination at the top that they were valueless” and, in 1945, as mostly derelict, but concluded that the Liberal revival of the 1950s was “the sum product of the organisation that has been going on at the local level since 1951 and the culmination of the policy of fighting local elections”.⁶² Rasmussen, however, justified overlooking the

⁵⁹ Baines, “Survival of the Liberal Party”, p97

⁶⁰ Wallace, “Liberal Revival”, pp413, 418; Douglas, History of the Liberal Party, pp294–5

⁶¹ Sell, “Jo Grimond”, pp308–10

⁶² Sommer, “Organisation of the Liberal Party”, pp45, 106, 165

activities of LAs and Liberal area federations by stating that “the Party’s sub-national bodies have little positive effect upon the operation and policies of the national party”.⁶³

Despite Rasmussen’s claim, the constitutional autonomy of LAs gave them a degree of influence over a variety of strategic and organisational matters. Ramussen himself noted that they had complete control over the selection of parliamentary candidates, were able to make electoral arrangements with other parties, were responsible for recruiting party members and Liberal News readers, and presented the Liberal Party’s policies to the electorate. Furthermore, the mass party, via the annual Assembly, elected the Party officers and defined the Party’s general objectives and specific policy commitments. The delegates to the 1956 Assembly made it clear that Clement Davies ought to resign as Liberal leader and that Jo Grimond should replace him. Delegates to the 1943 Assembly influenced the Party’s strategy at the forthcoming general election by calling for the leadership to refuse to participate in any post-war coalition government.⁶⁴ Sommer has observed that, in relation to the Party’s strategy for fighting parliamentary elections, “it is highly likely that no conscious decision was ever made” by the national party about how many candidates should stand because the matter was largely determined by individual LAs.⁶⁵

Consequently, the Liberal Party’s local organisation, and the activists who manned it, were crucially important in determining the nature of the Party’s message and the way in which it was conveyed to the electorate. This was especially the case in the era before television when contact between local political organisations and the electorate was a relatively more

⁶³ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p86

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp47, 56, 63, 88, 99, 105–6, 109

⁶⁵ Sommer, “Organisation of the Liberal Party”, p78

important means of determining the results of elections than is the case today. Rasmussen appears to have recognised this fact in stating that “whereas the regional and local organisations of the major parties enjoy little power, their counterparts in the Liberal Party ... possess great autonomy”, because “the local constituency associations are able to balk whatever decision is taken by the leaders of either the mass party or the parliamentary party”.⁶⁶

The Liberal Party Organisation certainly recognised the importance of its constituency associations. The Party’s Reconstruction Committee, appointed to reform the party machine following the 1945 general election, stated that “no amount of improvement in the organisation at national and area level will be of use, unless it is accompanied by a tremendous resurgence of effort in the constituency associations, upon which the responsibility for the future of the Party rests”.⁶⁷ The committee did not propose any reform of the Party’s constituency organisations, despite noting the problems caused by “decades of inactivity and discouragement”.⁶⁸ The area federations were intended to link the LPO with the constituency associations but, as Rasmussen discovered, not all of them functioned fully and some failed to function at all.⁶⁹ Thus, the national party operated for much of the time in ignorance of what was happening at the constituency level. When efforts were made to tour the constituencies or ask the local associations to report their membership and income to the national party, the onus was placed on constituency officers to volunteer the

⁶⁶ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp 98–9, 165

⁶⁷ “Coats off for the Future!”, Liberal Party Reconstruction Committee, Report, 1946, paragraph 116, p24

⁶⁸ Ibid., paragraph 115, p24

⁶⁹ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p87

required information. In many cases, the information was not provided or was deliberately exaggerated.⁷⁰

A common theme of all of the studies of the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period is that they do not analyse the relationship between the party leadership and the grass-roots of the Party, the activities of grass-roots institutions, the characteristics of the Party's activists, or the strategies employed by the Party in relation to local government elections. These factors are important because, as has been shown, they are regularly cited as relevant to the survival and revival of the Liberal Party. Study of the Liberal Party's grass-roots can help explain why people joined and worked for the Liberal Party, the effect LAs' activities had on the national party's finances and its strategy in parliamentary elections, and the interaction between the Liberals' local and parliamentary election strategies.

This thesis adopts a novel approach to the study of the Liberal Party by assessing its activities from the bottom up. It profiles constituency LAs (Chapter two) and ward and branch LAs (Chapter three), and considers the relationship between these bodies and the national party, particularly in relation to finance and the selection of Liberal local and parliamentary candidates. It profiles one of the groups associated with constituency LAs, the Young Liberals (Chapter four), to evaluate their significance to the Liberal Party as a whole, including in the light of the role that the Young Liberals were to play after 1964. The results of 142 interviews with Liberal activists, ranging from ordinary LA members to Liberal MPs, are analysed in Chapter five to show what motivated people to join and work for the Liberal Party, and to discover if Liberal Party members tended to agree with

⁷⁰ Interview, Lord Banks

the main pillars of the national party's policy programme and if they were generally more radical than the party leadership. The Liberal Party's position in local government during the 1945–64 period is systematically analysed for the first time in Chapter six and the crucial role played by Liberal activists in changing the Party's strategy is explained.

The main conclusion of this thesis is that the origins of community politics and the Liberal Party's emphasis on fighting local government elections after 1970 lie not with the Young Liberals of the mid- and late 1960s, who promoted the community politics resolution passed at the 1970 Liberal Assembly, but with activists in several areas of England and Scotland who placed new emphasis on local elections and developed new campaigning techniques after the 1950 general election. This change came about without the encouragement, or knowledge, of the national party, but was greatly assisted by the LPO later on. The Party's activists not only ensured the survival and revival of the Liberal Party, they changed its character, so that the Party of 1964 was recognisably different from that of 1945.

Other important conclusions are drawn from the complex relationship between the national party and its local associations, particularly concerning the ways in which the Party's chaotic structure facilitated its survival and revival. The analysis of Liberal activists shows that the majority regarded themselves as being primarily anti-Conservative and located somewhere on the left of British politics, and supports the argument that the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union movement kept many Liberals out of the Labour Party.

Methodology

This thesis is based upon 142 interviews with Liberal activists from the 1945–64 period, the majority of them conducted face-to-face,⁷¹ and the records of dozens of Liberal Party bodies, from ward associations to the LPO Executive Committee.⁷² The majority of LA records deposited in the UK have been consulted for the preparation of this thesis; interviews often allowed other records, in private hands, to be consulted. Previous research has focused on interviews with Liberal MPs and other senior party figures,⁷³ and eschewed examination of LA records,⁷⁴ but this thesis makes use of many previously untapped sources of information about the Liberal Party. In total, information has been gleaned about Liberal activity in over 250 constituencies, in all areas of the UK bar Northern Ireland.

The focus of this thesis is the activities of constituency Liberal associations and their ward and branch sub-units, and Young Liberal associations. Specific consideration has not been given to the role of Women's Liberal associations (WLAs) or Liberal Clubs. This thesis does not seek to analyse the policy or strategy of the Liberal Party in relation to parliamentary elections, matters which, although relevant to LAs, were generally decided by the national party. The relationship between the Liberal Party and the National Liberals at a local level has also not been examined.

⁷¹ Details are provided at p372

⁷² For a full list see p362

⁷³ For example, Rasmussen's interviews with Liberal parliamentary candidates

⁷⁴ Sell found LA records to be "sparse and generally uncatalogued" and consulted only a handful, "Jo Grimond", p332

This thesis does not set out to compare Liberal associations with their Conservative and Labour counterparts from the 1945–64 period. Such an exercise would be a considerable undertaking, requiring detailed research of the Conservative and Labour grass-roots organisations from that period. Published studies of local Conservative and Labour institutions during the 1945–64 period have tended to concentrate on specific areas, for example Turner’s study of three London constituency Labour parties in 1961–2, rather than on the UK as a whole. Turner has shown that some of the problems which beset Liberal associations, such as over-reliance on a small group of activists and unpredictable flows of income, also affected Labour’s grass-roots.⁷⁵ Some of his findings, and those of others, are used to make comparisons with LAs, below.

⁷⁵ J. E. Turner, Labour’s Doorstep Politics in London (Macmillan, 1978) pp15, 23

II. Constituency Liberal Associations

Academics have paid little attention to the sub-national organisational units of British political parties, choosing instead to emphasise the manner by which such units can be controlled by national party leaderships. After examining power relationships within the Conservative and Labour parties, Robert MacKenzie concluded that “the distribution of power within British political parties is primarily a function of cabinet government and the British parliamentary system ... whatever the role granted in theory to the extra-parliamentary wings of the parties, in practice final authority rests in both parties with the parliamentary party and its leadership”.⁷⁶ Rasmussen extended MacKenzie’s analysis to consider the relationship between the Liberal Party Organisation and the parliamentary Liberal Party. He concluded that “despite the Liberal Party’s distance from office, its power structure differs in no basic aspect from the power relationships existing in both major parties”,⁷⁷ because the demands of the UK’s governmental system provided Liberal parliamentarians with “an argument for independence” and convinced both parliamentarians and party activists of the “essentiality of a particular internal distribution of power”.⁷⁸

Rasmussen argued that the price Liberal parliamentarians paid for their independence from control by the mass party was the reciprocal autonomy of the Party’s sub-national units. He stated that “whereas the regional and local organisations of the major parties enjoy little

⁷⁶ R. MacKenzie, British Political Parties (Mercury, 1963) p635

⁷⁷ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p166

⁷⁸ Ibid., p171

power, their counterparts in the Liberal Party, which has declined to establish a professional staff chain of command extending up to national headquarters, possess great autonomy. Therefore the Liberal parliamentary party is prevented from exerting much control over such key matters as strategy, candidates, policy and finance at this level of party organisation. But although this local independence weakens the parliamentary party's power to direct the Party's activities, yet it does not restrict the parliamentary party's freedom of action".⁷⁹ Rasmussen drew this conclusion without studying either the Liberal Party's area federations or its constituency associations. Indeed, and as has been noted, in his short section on the Party's sub-national organisations he declared that "the Party's sub-national bodies have little positive effect upon the operation and policies of the national party", and that the autonomy of these bodies could be ascribed to "Liberal distrust of central direction and national headquarters' lack of funds".⁸⁰

Given Rasmussen's inadequate and contradictory approach to the Liberal Party's sub-national organisations it is useful to study them, their inter-relationships, and their interaction with the national party, in detail, in order to establish whether or not they exercised control over "key matters" or whether they had "little positive effect" on the national party.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p165

⁸⁰ Ibid., p86

Definitions

The Liberal Party's headquarters consisted of two different bodies. The Liberal Party Organisation, which represented the mass party and whose key organs were the Assembly, Party Council, Executive Committee, and Organising or Standing Committee, and the Liberal Central Association (LCA), which was an office maintained by the Chief Whip for the purposes of recruiting, placing and financing parliamentary election candidates.⁸¹ The distinction between the LPO and the LCA was unclear to many during the post-war period, particularly when the LPO's Standing Committee was formed in 1960, its aims including the better organisation and financing of Liberal candidates in by-elections and winnable constituencies.⁸²

The LPO was represented in the regions by area federations, which Rasmussen said were intended to "facilitate administrative decentralisation and to provide more immediate assistance to the constituency associations than national headquarters can give".⁸³ As has been noted, they did not all function fully. Some, such as the Yorkshire and North West Federations,⁸⁴ employed full-time staff throughout the 1945–64 period, while others, such

⁸¹ See Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp50–92 for an explanation of the roles of the LPO and LCA

⁸² LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 23 Nov 62 for a discussion of the relationship between the LPO and LCA

⁸³ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p87

⁸⁴ The North West Federation was known as the Lancashire, Cheshire and North West Federation until 1962 but its more modern name is used throughout this thesis. See North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 24 Nov 61. Throughout this thesis all references to "Minutes" are to the minutes of executive committee or annual general meetings, unless otherwise stated

as the Northern Counties Federation were virtually derelict throughout.⁸⁵ The Scottish Liberal Party (SLP) was formally separate from the Liberal Party but, as will be seen, the LPO and the parliamentary party were able to by-pass the SLP and supervise candidate selection and financial arrangements in several Scottish constituencies by 1964.⁸⁶ Consequently, it is more convenient to consider the SLP as the equivalent of an English federation rather than as a separate party.

In some areas of the country, county or city Liberal organisations were interposed between the area federations and constituency organisations. These were intended to coordinate the activities of constituency associations, for example in relation to local government elections. Some, such as the Birmingham Liberal Federation, pre-dated Liberal constituency associations. Others, such as the Teesside Liberal Council, were more modern creations, designed to assist the administration of the area federations.⁸⁷

Rasmussen described the functions of LAs as “typical of all such organisations in any party: the presentation of the Party’s views, the recruitment of members, improvement of organisation, and other such duties”.⁸⁸ LAs varied in size and influence across the country and throughout the 1945–64 period. The largest, such as Devon North LA after 1959, were

⁸⁵ In 1962 the Northern Counties Federation was described by a prominent Liberal in the following terms: “apart from maintaining an improperly manned office in Newcastle, the Northern Counties Federation performs no useful function. Its officers are, in the main, too old or too unwilling (or both) to provide any driving force whatsoever” — LPO Organising Committee, Papers, memorandum OC62/53, “Appointment of an Organiser in the Northern Counties”, A. Share, 6 Nov 62, LSE file 5/2, p145

⁸⁶ The Scottish Liberal Federation had been part of the LPO but the SLP, which succeeded the Federation in 1946, regarded itself as autonomous. This was the cause of some constitutional confusion — see Scottish Liberal Party, Minutes, 11 Sep 50

⁸⁷ Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 5 Jul 52 on the formation of the Teesside Liberal Council

⁸⁸ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p88

amongst the largest and most significant constituency political organisations in the country, with around 4,000 members, numerous ward and branch associations, an income of £2,000 per annum, and a vibrant programme of social and political events.⁸⁹ The smallest struggled to maintain their existence with only a handful of activists, an income of less than £50 per annum, and few, if any, political activities. Ramussen identified finance and candidate selection as two significant areas in which the sub-national units of the Liberal Party could demonstrate their autonomy from the national party, and these are the subject of this Chapter.

Finance

FINANCIAL POSITION AFTER 1945

Prior to 1950, the Liberal Party was financed at all levels primarily by a small number of rich benefactors.⁹⁰ These donors supported the Liberal Party in one of two ways. They could subscribe a regular sum directly to the Liberal organisation of their choice, or they responded to the irregular appeals for cash made by the treasurers of the Party’s bodies. Table 2 illustrates the extent to which direct subscribers and individual donations supported the Party’s sub-national organisations.

⁸⁹ Interview, Lilian Prowse; and see the papers of Southend West LA

⁹⁰ “Coats off for the Future!”, paragraph 193, p38; London Liberal Party, Minutes, 6 Sep 39, 11 Nov 39 for details of Lord Meston’s appeal to 75 ‘special friends’

Table 2: Liberal Party Sub-national Finance, before 1950

Organisation	Year	Income Source (%)						
		Direct subscribers	Affiliations from constituency and district LAs	Social events and sales	Collections and donations	Other	Total	Total (£ s d)
London Liberal Party (LLP) ⁹¹	1949	18.6	6.89	4.55	61.64	8.32	100	1,503 13 1
Birmingham Liberal Association ⁹²	1944	47.65	51.41	0	0	0.94	100	636 14 9
Chester Liberal Association ⁹³	1945	57.67	0	27.83	3.56	10.93	100	348 12 9

Moreover, both the federations and constituencies depended upon the national party for substantial grants. The federations looked to the national party for financial support every year; the constituency associations called upon the resources of the LCA in order to finance general election campaigns. The county and city Liberal organisations were usually unable to call upon national resources; they did not contest elections directly, and were not seen as vital components of the Liberal machine. Consequently, they tended to be the poor relations of the Liberal Party.⁹⁴ For example, the income of Sheffield Liberal Council totalled £25 8s 3d in the years 1952–4 and the Manchester Liberal Federation was overdrawn throughout the 1945–64 period, sometimes by as much as £3,000.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Walthamstow West WLA, Papers, Accounts of London Liberal Party 1949

⁹² Birmingham LA, Enquiry Committee, Report, p44

⁹³ Chester LA, Cash book 1944–52, 1945 income and expenditure accounts

⁹⁴ Southend West LA, Minutes, 14 Feb 64 and Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 31 Mar 47. Both deprecate the Essex County Liberal Party, which was one of the more active county Liberal groupings in the country

⁹⁵ Mirfin Papers and Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 1944–64

There were numerous disadvantages of this system of finance. Firstly, the constituency associations paid only modest affiliation fees to the national party, the federations and the city and county units. They were not expected to make any further, regular contributions although many made occasional donations. Confident that general election campaigns would be funded by a combination of local donations, the LCA, and the candidates themselves, constituency associations often had no need for fund-raising social and political events. Their membership and vitality declined, because money-raising events provided both a means of recruiting party members and a motivation for joining the party. Thus, the Liberal candidate for Merioneth wrote in December 1955 when confirming that he did not wish to be re-adopted, that “until Liberals in the County of Merioneth learn to subscribe individual fees annually so as to provide the basic income necessary to keep the organisation in being then liberalism will not flourish”.⁹⁶ Similarly, the federations lacked incentives to encourage activity in the constituency associations because increased activity did not tend to raise significantly the contribution made by the associations to the federations.

Secondly, the Liberal Party was disproportionately influenced by its major benefactors, to the detriment of internal party democracy. In particular, major donors to LAs played a central role in the recruitment of parliamentary candidates. Sir Thomas and Lady Glen-Coats made substantial contributions to the finances of the Scottish Liberal Party and were also able to influence decisions about which constituencies should be contested in general elections and the selection of Liberal candidates.⁹⁷ Oliver Smedley used his money and

⁹⁶ Merioneth LA, Papers, letter from H. E. Jones to H. G. Williams, 9 Dec 55 (reference 7/2856)

⁹⁷ Interviews, J. G. Gray and T. R. L. Fraser and Scottish Liberal Party, Minutes, 16 Sep 47

influence with the LCA to ensure that a free trade candidate replaced him as Liberal candidate in Saffron Walden in 1959.⁹⁸

Thirdly, the Party's financial position was especially susceptible to the withdrawal of large donations, as benefactors died, became disillusioned with the Party's electoral record, or were forced to cope with higher levels of taxation. There were some donors, such as Lord Sherwood, who, according to Conservative Central Office, "would fight to his last penny to do us down",⁹⁹ but their number was declining. Bequests were important sources of income for the Leeds Liberal Federation, however, and a substantial inheritance helped alleviate the Manchester Liberal Federation's financial crisis in 1953.¹⁰⁰

The Liberal Party's post-war Reconstruction Committee grappled with these issues and advocated a thorough democratisation of the Party's finances, the aim of which was to ensure that "every man and woman in the country who is a Liberal will effectively contribute to [the Party's] maintenance".¹⁰¹ The report recommended that:

- in future, all general election expenses should be paid for solely by the Liberal association incurring them¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Interview, David Ridley

⁹⁹ Conservative Party Papers, internal memorandum by J. P. L. Thomas, 9 Mar 50, Conservative Party Archive reference CCO3/2/112

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Joan Davies; Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 9 Jun 53, 13 Oct 53

¹⁰¹ "Coats off for the Future!", paragraph 194, p38

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, paragraph 195, p38

- federation and headquarters funds should be raised jointly, by a specialist Appeals Department, so that federations could be provided with an assured income¹⁰³
- the constituency affiliation fee should be replaced by a quota payable to headquarters and agreed in advance with them, of between £50 and £100 per year
- constituency fund-raising should concentrate on collecting small sums of money from a large number of sympathisers, through regular social events, sales of badges and literature, special events such as bazaars, weekly and monthly bond schemes, and the commercial provision of “holidays, sport, international tours and rallies”.¹⁰⁴

The purpose of these reforms was to reverse the flow of finance within the Party. Rather than the national party funding the federations and candidates’ election expenses, the constituencies were given the responsibility of funding the federations and headquarters through the joint or combined finance scheme and of fighting general elections unaided. It was hoped that the Foundation Day bond and compact schemes, by which constituency associations pledged to give £50 per year to headquarters for a certain length of time after 1947, would accustom the associations to paying such a sizeable, regular contribution. The Reconstruction Committee did not entirely ignore the possibility of seeking further large donations. One of the tasks of the Appeals Department would be to monitor the “careful selection of, and right approach to, individual subscribers”.¹⁰⁵

The national party faced two considerable drawbacks if these reforms were to be implemented. Firstly, if the constituency associations were required to fund their election

¹⁰³ Ibid., paragraphs 215–217, p41

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., paragraphs 207–212, p40

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., paragraph 213, p41

campaigns entirely then the national party would be unable to use its control of financial resources to influence candidate selection. The role of the LCA in placing candidates according to the wishes of the Chief Whip would be likely to be diminished. Secondly, if constituency associations were to become responsible for the funding of the federations and the national party then they would become able to express grievances against these bodies by withholding their contributions. When the reforms were implemented, these problems became evident.

FUNDING OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The implementation of the reforms to the financing of the Liberal Party proposed by the Reconstruction Committee was neither thorough nor fully successful. There was a strong feeling within the Liberal federations and constituency associations that the national party could and should provide financial assistance, particularly in order to pay the expenses of parliamentary election campaigns. It is significant that the Reconstruction Committee's report on finance began by stating categorically "that the Liberal Party does not possess, nor has it access to, any large private fund".¹⁰⁶ Even senior Liberals suspected otherwise. Sir Alfred Suenson-Taylor, later Lord Grantchester and a Treasurer of the Liberal Party, commented in 1947 that he believed the Chief Whip's Office was responsible for the general election expenses of Liberal candidates. Edward Martell, Deputy Chairman of the LCA, replied that, "this was not so now, but the question of election expenses was exercising the mind of the Chief Whip".¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., paragraph 192, p38

¹⁰⁷ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 20 Nov 47

Indeed, the Chief Whip, through the office of the LCA, remained heavily involved with the election expenses of Liberal candidates in the 1950 general election and beyond, despite the advice of the Reconstruction Committee. It was the avowed intention of the Party, expressed as early as 1945, to contest the 1950 election on a broad front and national funds were required to back Liberal candidates in constituencies boasting only a limited Liberal presence.¹⁰⁸ The LCA raised a special election fund by appealing to donors through the Liberal Party's Treasurers and this money was distributed to candidates.¹⁰⁹ Constituency associations were well aware of the existence of this fund and routinely applied for assistance prior to the commencement of election campaigns.¹¹⁰

In 1950 the LCA concentrated on funding the expenses of candidates in constituencies where Liberal associations were newly formed or even in the process of formation, so that all candidates could "put up a good fight".¹¹¹ The three-year-old Peckham Liberal Association contributed only £18 towards the expenses of Kenneth Gunnell, the rest of his expenses being paid by headquarters.¹¹² The four Leicester Liberal associations were all weak: the strongest, in Leicester South East, had only been formed in October 1948.¹¹³ Table 3 highlights the role of the national party in ensuring that Liberal candidates contested all four Leicester constituencies in 1950 and illustrates the extent to which LAs remained free of the responsibility of paying for their candidates' election expenses in full.

¹⁰⁸ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p94

¹⁰⁹ A separate but identical fund was raised for the benefit of Scottish Liberal candidates. Murray Papers, letter from Lady Glen-Coats to D. Murray, 23 Dec 51

¹¹⁰ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, Election Committee meeting Nov 49

¹¹¹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 19 Feb 50

¹¹² Peckham LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 50

¹¹³ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, frontispiece

Table 3: Liberal Parliamentary Candidates’ Election Expenses in Leicester, 1950¹¹⁴

Division	Source of election expenses											
	Candidate		Constituency Liberal Association		Leicester Liberal Party		Liberal Party HQ		Other		Total	
	£ s d	%	£ s d	%	£ s d	%	£ s d	%	£ s d	%	£ s d	%
North East	10 18 0	0.23	155 6 5	34.11	121 15 6	26.74	131 5 0	28.82	36 2 6	10.1	455 7 5	100
North West	367 0 10	91.14	0	0	35 3 7	8.74	0	0	0 10 0	0.12	402 14 5	100
South East	104 2 0	23.65	181 3 10	41.17	126 1 6	28.65	0	0	28 14 6	6.53	440 1 10	100
South West	14 18 0	4.11	112 4 1	30.92	100 0 0	27.56	100 0 0	27.56	35 15 7	9.85	362 17 8	100

After the 1950 general election the national party was forced to alter its policy towards election finance. It informed the federations that funding for candidates would not generally be available at the next general election.¹¹⁵ This did not reflect a willingness to abide by the recommendations of the Reconstruction Committee’s report but instead recognised the Party’s inability to launch another election fund in time for the next election, following the Liberals’ disastrous result in 1950. Money was still made available by headquarters to a handful of candidates in 1951. David Murray received £250 from the Scottish Liberal Party to contest the Western Isles, despite having opposed an official Liberal as an independent Home Rule candidate at the preceding election.¹¹⁶ This money was provided to demonstrate the Party’s opposition to Conservative and National Liberal candidates, one of whom was backed by the renegade Western Isles LA.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 5 Jan 50

¹¹⁵ London Liberal Party, Executive Committee, Minutes, 20 Jul 50. Some LAs suspected, or had been warned, before 1950 that headquarters would no longer be able to help with election expenses, although this did not stop them applying for funds — see Leeds South LA, Minutes, 17 Oct 49, 4 Jan 50

¹¹⁶ Murray Papers, letters from J. Carson to D. Murray, 16 Oct 51 and Lady Glen-Coats to D. Murray, 25 Jan 50; and see p84

In 1955 the national party was again able to help fund general election contests and the Party's annual report publicly stated that almost every candidate had received a grant.¹¹⁷ The aim that each constituency association should be able to pay its own general election expenses had been implicitly repudiated by this time. LAs had continued to request assistance from the national party, despite the exhortations of the Reconstruction Committee; donors to the Liberal Party remained keen to provide assistance. The debate after 1955 was increasingly concerned with how national resources should be targeted, to maximise their effectiveness. The provision of financial assistance to LAs fighting by-elections became a more important priority. The LCA spent £1,000 on by-elections in 1960 and £3,650 in 1962, including meeting debts incurred by Leicester North East LA.¹¹⁸ Money was also disbursed to "special constituencies", which were considered winnable in a general election, mostly for the appointment of agents.¹¹⁹ The practice of targeting constituencies in this way emerged from the 1961 report of the Forward Planning Committee, headed by Timothy Joyce, and was a controversial matter. There were to be no references to winnable seats, which would instead be described as "strategically important constituencies which required special attention".¹²⁰ Joyce's scheme was largely superseded by Jeremy Thorpe's Special Aid Scheme, which will be considered later.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p21. However, London Liberal Party, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 20 Oct 64, state that all fighting associations received some HQ funding for the first time in 1964

¹¹⁸ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 30 Apr 62, 27 Oct 62, 15 Dec 62 and Organising Committee, Minutes, 22 Nov 60, 29 Oct 62

¹¹⁹ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 27 Oct 62 and Organising Committee, Minutes 11 Dec 61

¹²⁰ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 27 Nov 61

¹²¹ See p96

THE QUOTA SCHEME

The Reconstruction Committee’s suggestions that constituency associations should pay an annual quota to the national party, and that the federations should be paid a share of this quota as income guaranteed by headquarters, which together were intended to democratise party finance by eliciting a far larger contribution to national party funds from the constituency associations than had ever before been forthcoming, were not implemented with complete success, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4: Sources of LPO Income¹²²

Income Source (%)	1949	1955	1961	1964
Subscriptions, donations, bonds and bequests	43.17	54.33	53.43	28.99
Appeals	45.23 ¹²³	41.17	20.70	47.82
LA affiliations and quotas ¹²⁴	6.76	4.50	20.06	18.26
<u>Liberal News</u> ¹²⁵	3.38	0	0	0
By-election/agents’ funds	0	0	5.02	4.22
Other	1.46	0	0.79	0.71
Total	100	100	100	100
Total (£)	28,422	19,431	52,373	82,965

Table 4 shows that the Liberal Party did become less reliant on its individual benefactors following the publication of the Reconstruction Committee’s report and that the

¹²² Annual Report and Accounts, LPO, 1950, 1963, 1964 and 1965; and Wallace, “Liberal Revival”, Table 1, p189

¹²³ Net of the contributions from the Campaign Appeal remitted to the federations and constituency associations

¹²⁴ This is a gross figure, including the proportion of quota income which was remitted to the federations. The 1949 figure was reported net of the payment to federations. In order to facilitate a comparison with later accounts the net figure was doubled and then used to calculate the percentages given. The 1949 percentages are not, therefore, as accurate as the others in this table

¹²⁵ Where 0 is shown, this indicates that the Liberal News made a loss

contribution of the Liberal associations to headquarters did increase accordingly. The democratisation of party fund-raising was partial, however. Even in 1961 over one-half of the national party's income came from subscriptions, donations, Liberal bonds and bequests. The Party relied as heavily on appeals, and the Assembly appeal in particular, as it had done in the 1940s and a poorly attended Assembly could still cause severe financial problems. The Liberal News, conceived as the means by which “every man and woman in the country who is a Liberal” could contribute effortlessly to party funds, was a disaster in fund-raising terms. It lurched intermittently from profit to loss and back again, and even when in profit made an insignificant contribution to party funds.¹²⁶

The democratisation of party finance was more successfully attained at federation level, as Table 5 confirms:

¹²⁶ The Liberal News was registered as a newspaper for the first time in 1962, indicating that it was no longer considered by the Party to be a fund-raising device — LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 8 Dec 61

Table 5: Sources of Federation Income, 1962

(%)	Subscriptions	Donations	Appeals	LAs	Sales	Social Events	Other	Total	Total (£ s d)
London Liberal Party ¹²⁷	3.09	5.32	0	75.47 ¹²⁸	3.13	11.32	1.67	100	2,650 6 7
Eastern Counties Federation ¹²⁹	50	0	0	43.04	0	4.92	2.04	100	158 9 6
North West Federation ¹³⁰	28.02	14.62	5.50	46.64 ¹³¹	3.00	0	2.22	100	3,842 9 1

The contrast in the sources of the London Liberal Party’s finances between Tables 2 and 5 is striking. By 1962 the London Liberal Party was able to rely for the bulk of its income on its constituency associations and a handful of social functions supported by them, including the London Liberal Association draws and a large-scale garden party. In contrast, Liberal associations provided less than one-half of the incomes of the Eastern Counties and North West Federations in 1962. Direct subscribers and donors remained vitally important to both Federations. Sixteen years after the Reconstruction Committee reported, the quota system was working well in some parts of the country, but less well in others.

There were several reasons why the quota system had not been successfully implemented throughout the country by the early 1960s. Firstly, the quota system had taken many years

¹²⁷ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 4 Mar 63

¹²⁸ London constituencies raised £1,861 5s 0d in quota payments; the London Liberal Party retained all of this money and was given a further contribution by the LPO of £138 15s 0d. This full £2,000 is used to calculate this percentage

¹²⁹ Eastern Counties Liberal Federation, Minutes, 31 Mar 62, income for year ending 28 Feb 62

¹³⁰ North West Liberal Federation, Accounts, 1962

¹³¹ North West constituencies raised £2,499 18s 0d in quota payments; £614 1s 0d of this was remitted to the LPO and not returned. The contribution remaining with the Federation is included in this percentage

to develop and had evolved from a plethora of confusing and short-lived fund-raising schemes, as the minutes of the London Liberal Party show well. The Liberal Party's accounts for 1949 show that a proportion of both the Campaign Fund, established to raise money for the impending general election, and the constituency affiliation fees, was remitted to the federations. This promising start does not tell the full story, however. No attempt was made by the LPO to extract at least £50 from each constituency association, as the Reconstruction Committee had recommended. Most constituencies paid only a bare one guinea affiliation fee. Exceptional was the Liberal association which contributed more than this amount to LPO funds.¹³² Furthermore, the Appeals Committee, established to implement this aspect of the proposed financial reforms, was absorbed into the Chief Whip's Office in 1948 and used solely to run the Campaign Fund.¹³³

Federation officers did not, therefore, recognise the link between the money they received from the LPO and the amounts contributed by the constituencies. Although the LPO did begin to remit some of its income to the federations after 1946, the federations still required an affiliation fee from the constituency associations separate from that given to the LPO.¹³⁴ A scheme had been proposed in 1947, whereby the LPO would give the London Liberal Party £500 plus an extra £100 on a pound-for-pound basis. This seems to have failed because the Federation made no effort to raise the additional income for the national party and regarded the initial £500 payment as equivalent to a grant under the pre-

¹³² For example, Chester LA, Cash Book 1944–52. Chester LA did contribute more than the affiliation fee, but the amount varied from year to year and never approached £50

¹³³ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 16 Sep 48

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 Apr 49

war funding system.¹³⁵ After the 1950 election the LPO arbitrarily reduced its grant to the London Liberal Party, throwing the Federation almost entirely on its own resources. The Federation survived by organising a highly successful Christmas draw, which was shortly to be declared illegal.¹³⁶

A more thorough joint finance scheme was unveiled in September 1952 in response to the severe financial difficulties that the federations had been encountering since the tap of LPO funding was turned off. The LPO promised to give the London Liberal Party £250 for every £1,000 contributed to national funds by London members (not constituency associations).¹³⁷ The London Liberal Party, eager for funds, responded to this offer by deciding to keep 25 per cent of the first £500 raised by London members and to keep 25 per cent of each successive £100 raised.¹³⁸ The scheme was soon revised again. The £1,000 limit was abandoned by the LPO and instead, for each pound donated, the national party would remit four shillings to the appropriate federation and one shilling to the constituency association.¹³⁹ The Pound Scheme was not a success although it was to be operated for several years. Later, in 1953, another scheme was launched, to raise £1,000, the money to be shared between the LPO and the London Liberal Party, but this too failed.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Ibid., 15 May 47

¹³⁶ Ibid., 15 May 47, 15 Feb 49, 20 Oct 49, 20 Apr 50, 16 Nov 50. Throughout this period London Liberal Party officers agonised over the possible withdrawal of the LPO grant, indicating that it was regarded as discretionary rather than a reflection of the amount of money Liberal associations in London were contributing to the LPO

¹³⁷ Ibid., 15 Sep 52. Members of the LLP Council immediately collected £47 on the announcement of this scheme, which was known as the Liberal Pound Scheme

¹³⁸ Ibid., 16 Oct 52

¹³⁹ Ibid., 18 Jan 53

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 18 Jun 53, 8 Mar 54

In 1954 Liberal association treasurers were invited to meet officers of the London Liberal Party to discuss LPO and federation finance.¹⁴¹ This was the first occasion, in London at least, at which the need for a link between constituency, federation, and national party finance was made explicit, eight years after it had been suggested by the Reconstruction Committee.¹⁴² Another five years would pass before the combined finance quota scheme recommended in 1946 was to be adopted by the LPO and all of the area federations. In 1954 Liberal associations agreed a quota with the LPO, and the money raised was split between the LPO and the appropriate federation.¹⁴³ This scheme was an interim one only, and the arrangements for 1955 were not confirmed until the last two weeks of 1954.¹⁴⁴ In 1955 it was decided that the federations would retain all of the money raised by quotas — combined finance was shelved, on the initiative of the Liberal Party's General Director, H. F. P. Harris.¹⁴⁵ London LAs promised £756 10s 0d to the London Liberal Party in 1955, but only 30 LAs participated in the scheme.¹⁴⁶ Only £450 was promised in 1956, although 42 LAs contributed.¹⁴⁷ In 1957 it was decided to give all of the money raised by the quota scheme over a £500 threshold to the LPO; however, only £420 was promised in 1957 and £410 in 1958 and, during 1958, the London Liberal Party was forced to borrow money

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 21 Jan 54

¹⁴² Nothing seems to have come of two earlier proposals, that LAs should organise one money-raising event each year for, or that rich LAs should be approached for regular contributions to, federation funds — London Liberal Party, Minutes, 15 Mar 48 and Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 13 Sep 59

¹⁴³ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 18 Feb 54, 20 May 54

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 16 Dec 54. See also LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 10 Dec 54

¹⁴⁵ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 10 Jan 55. Harris stated that his first priority was to get all of the federations fully operational. Also LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 10 Dec 54. Harris indicated that he wanted to see more reliance placed on the Assembly appeal and less on the quota scheme to raise funds

¹⁴⁶ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 15 Sep 55, 17 Nov 55

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 17 May 56, 19 Jul 56

from its own officers.¹⁴⁸ A resolution was passed requiring all London LAs to raise their subscription fees, and for all money subscribed to them over one shilling to be given to the Federation. This was regarded as an intolerable incursion into local autonomy and was ignored.¹⁴⁹ Finally, in 1959, on the initiative of Party Treasurer Colonel Lort-Phillips, the LPO introduced the full quota system. Local associations were asked (although not obliged) to contribute £100 per annum to the LPO, on top of their affiliation fee. In return, the LPO would give each federation £1,000 per annum and 10 per cent of all monies contributed in their area.¹⁵⁰

Table 5 thus shows federation income during only the fourth year since the introduction of the quota scheme. The London Liberal Party derived more of its income from its constituency associations than the other two federations noted because it had operated a quota scheme of its own for longer and was generally better organised. The Eastern Counties Federation had no full-time staff at this point and its annual income was only one-sixteenth of that of the London Liberal Party. Furthermore, the federations themselves were not always enthusiastic supporters of the quota scheme. The Yorkshire Liberal Federation made little effort to encourage its constituency associations to participate in the 1954 quota scheme and the Northern Counties Federation withdrew from it altogether.¹⁵¹ Colonel Lort-Phillips faced hostile questioning from the Executive Committee of the Yorkshire Federation when he introduced the LPO's quota scheme to them in 1959 and the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 21 Feb 57, 17 Oct 57, 16 Jan 58, 29 Sep 58

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 29 Sep 58

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 18 Dec 58

¹⁵¹ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 12 Nov 54, 14 Jan 55; the Yorkshire Federation merely asked delegates to the 1954 Assembly to explain the quota scheme to LAs — Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 2 Oct 54

scheme’s merits were regularly debated by the Committee thereafter, the view that the LPO did not understand the financial pressures upon LAs being often expressed.¹⁵² Tables 6 and 7 illustrate this point.

Table 6: Payments Made by Liberal Associations to the LPO, 1961¹⁵³

	Unaffiliated LAs	LAs paying an affiliation fee or less ¹⁵⁴	LAs paying some quota, but less than £100	LAs paying at least £100
Devon and Cornwall	0	7	5	3
Eastern Counties	4	2	8	2
Home Counties	9	31	51	29
North West	17	18	26	8
London	12	14	24	3
East Midlands	7	16	8	0
West Midlands	8	21	15	0
Northern Counties	4	7	2	0
Western Counties	3	6	9	10
Yorkshire	6	24	6	1
Wales	7	12	4	0
Total	77	158	158	56

In the third year of the full quota scheme most Liberal associations contributed nothing or a bare affiliation fee, which varied from one to ten guineas, to the LPO. The tendency to ignore the quota scheme was strongest in the federations which were usually lacking in

¹⁵² Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 28 Feb 59, 16 Jul 60, 28 Jan 61, 1 Jul 61, 2 Dec 61, 29 Sep 62, 23 Mar 63, 30 Nov 63,

¹⁵³ LPO Papers, memorandum “Constituency Quota”, comparative figures for 1961 and up to 22 Nov 62. The SLP ran its own financial schemes independently of the LPO at this time. In 1958 the SLP requested £5 per 100 members from LAs, up to a maximum of £25. In 1961 the SLP required £100–200 from all “leading Liberal associations” (Inverness LA, Minutes, 21 Feb 58, 28 Apr 61)

¹⁵⁴ The LPO affiliation fee at this time was £10 10s 0d; in practice, as little as £1 1s 0d was accepted to affiliate a constituency association

full-time staff, notably the East and West Midlands and Northern Counties Federations and the Liberal Party of Wales; and in the two strongest provincial organisations, the Yorkshire and North West Federations.¹⁵⁵ These latter two did not lack staff, but were extremely cautious of ceding autonomy to London.¹⁵⁶

Table 7 shows that the average donation to LPO funds by the constituency associations in 1961 was only £28 18s 2d — i.e. an affiliation fee of 10 guineas plus another £18. Quota contributions in the first eleven months of 1962 were 7.70 per cent higher than for 1961 as a whole,¹⁵⁷ but the position worsened towards the general election. In 1963, the average quota payment from LAs was around £8 and the contribution received by headquarters from the quota scheme did not cover the running costs of the LPO Finance Department: only 57 LAs paid their quotas in full and 220 paid just an affiliation fee.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ For evidence of friction between the North West Federation and the LPO because of the quota scheme see LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 27 Jan 62

¹⁵⁶ Leeds South LA, Minutes, 15 Mar 48, for criticism of the party leadership at a Yorkshire Federation meeting; North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 1 Dec 44, 19 Oct 45, 14 Dec 45, 19 Dec 47, 18 Mar 49, 15 Jan 60 for criticism of the party leadership

¹⁵⁷ LPO Papers, “Constituency Quota”

¹⁵⁸ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 19 Jul 63, 23 Nov 63, 13 Dec 63

Table 7: Average Liberal Association Contribution to LPO funds, 1961¹⁵⁹

Federation	Average LA contribution ¹⁶⁰
	£ s d
Western Counties	50 5 6
Home Counties	44 19 8
Devon and Cornwall	42 3 4
Eastern Counties	33 14 8
North West	25 8 -
London	23 15 10
East Midlands	14 18 10
Yorkshire	14 15 7
West Midlands	14 13 9
Northern Counties	8 5 4
Wales	4 1 1
England and Wales	28 18 2

Two further problems hampered the democratisation of party finance through use of the quota system. The first was the problem of free riding. Liberal associations were required to pay only an affiliation fee in order to appoint Assembly delegates and to use all of the resources offered by the LPO. LAs were under only a moral obligation to pay an extra contribution, and that obligation could easily be dodged. Free riding was quickly identified as a serious problem and the federations attempted to overcome it by holding regular meetings with constituency association chairmen at which the dire consequences of not fulfilling their quota obligations could be explained.¹⁶¹ Constituency associations

¹⁵⁹ LPO Papers, “Constituency Quota”

¹⁶⁰ including Liberal associations which did not affiliate to the LPO

¹⁶¹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 20 Dec 54, 21 Nov 55, 21 Nov 57

occasionally contributed their quotas on the condition that other associations did likewise, in an effort to overcome free riding, but without notable success.¹⁶² The LPO attempted to link the provision of grants for the employment of federation staff to the efficient operation of the quota scheme but this approach failed because it had no significant impact on LAs.¹⁶³ The only solution the LPO could find to the free riding problem was to raise the affiliation fee to twelve guineas in 1963 and to £25 in 1964.

Secondly, Liberal associations found several reasons why they were unable to contribute £100 to LPO funds. Chief amongst these was poverty. Peckham LA promised to pay the LPO £20 in March 1954, but within the year the association was defunct. In the five years from 1947 to 1951 the association's total income had been only £66 and its bank balance had never once reached the £20 promised to headquarters.¹⁶⁴ Unsuccessful social events could wipe out the amount allocated to the LPO in an association's budget, as happened at Walthamstow West in 1957.¹⁶⁵ Faversham LA, rather than contribute to the headquarters' quota, asked the LPO for funds to cover its day-to-day running costs in 1963. The LPO informed the association that the need of headquarters was greater.¹⁶⁶

In response to this obvious weakness, the federations and headquarters frequently bargained with associations to find a quota payment appropriate to the latter. This

¹⁶² Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 5 Apr 54, 17 Oct 55. The LA promised to give the East Midlands Federation £25 if eleven LAs did likewise. The next minuted reference to finance noted that the association would not make any contribution to headquarters or the Federation. See also Stratford-on-Avon LA, Minutes, 24 Jun 52, for a similar scheme involving West Midlands constituencies

¹⁶³ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 11 Apr 60

¹⁶⁴ Peckham LA, Minutes, especially 18 Jul 50

¹⁶⁵ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 29 Feb 57

¹⁶⁶ Faversham LA, Minutes, 8 Nov 63

compromised the effectiveness of the quota system, weakened the obligation on associations to assume responsibility for headquarters' finance, and encouraged free riding. Ilford South LA suggested to the London Liberal Party that new associations should be set a lower target than £100, and this suggestion was taken up.¹⁶⁷ The Eastern Counties Federation set a quota for Cambridgeshire LA of only £20 in 1954, which was reduced to £5 by 1957.¹⁶⁸ Lewisham North LA was set a £40 quota in 1954, but protestations from the officers encouraged the London Liberal Party to reduce that to £30. In 1962 the quota was still lower, at £20, and even by 1964 had been increased only to £40 again.¹⁶⁹ The North West Federation agreed to implement Lort-Phillips' quota scheme only after the Federation's Secretary had prepared a "schedule of possibility" of contributions likely to be forthcoming from LAs, which suggested that payments of £100 per annum were not expected from the majority of divisional associations in the region.¹⁷⁰

Knowledge that the LPO could arbitrarily alter the level at which association quotas were set encouraged LAs to send less money than they were meant to, for what appeared to the LPO to be purely parochial reasons. Harwich LA consistently refused to accept a £100 quota and by the end of each year had usually paid less than it had promised at the start.¹⁷¹ Cambridgeshire LA, which had been allowed to negotiate its quota payment with its area federation, ignored a request for a quota in 1954, sent only £5 of a promised £20 in 1955

¹⁶⁷ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 30 May 60; Clapham LA, Minutes, 19 Jul 60

¹⁶⁸ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 6 Mar 54, 19 Oct 57

¹⁶⁹ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 14 Jun 54, 27 Aug 63, 2 Dec 63

¹⁷⁰ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 16 Jan 59, 20 Feb 59

¹⁷¹ Harwich LA, Minutes, 25 Feb 54, 18 Jan 57, 6 Feb 59, 27 Jun 59

and repeated that performance in 1957 and 1958.¹⁷² A similar lack of interest in the needs of the LPO was noticeable in Stratford-upon-Avon LA, which upon its reformation in 1955 subscribed first to the United Nations' Association rather than to the Liberal Party.¹⁷³ Altrincham and Sale LA contributed more money to the North West Liberal Federation than to the national party until the early 1960s, illustrating the insular characteristics of the provincial Liberal federations at that time.¹⁷⁴

Several Liberal associations used their new-found financial clout to their own advantage. In 1956 Hendon North LA refused to pay a quota until the London Liberal Party made economies and sacked its full-time secretary, Maureen Terry.¹⁷⁵ That advice was ignored but, at a time when the Federation claimed it needed £700 per annum from its constituency associations, there was a risk that the associations could force the federations to reduce their activities, against the wishes of the LPO. The London Liberal Party was also refused funding by Hampstead LA and Lewisham North LA, because of dissatisfaction with the Federation's performance.¹⁷⁶ Newbury LA withheld its entire £100 quota in 1961, claiming that the Home Counties Federation had not cooperated with it fully during the previous year. The association continued its boycott in 1962, but contributed £35 earmarked solely for headquarters.¹⁷⁷ The LPO Council was informed in 1959 that "there was a very grave disinclination on the part of a considerable number of constituencies in Devon and

¹⁷² Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 6 Mar 54, 5 Feb 55, 2 Mar 57, 30 Aug 58, 16 Jan 59. See also Surrey East LA, Minutes, 14 Jan 58, for similar issues

¹⁷³ Stratford-upon-Avon LA, Minutes, 7 Jan 55

¹⁷⁴ Altrincham and Sale LA, General Council, Minutes, 25 Mar 60

¹⁷⁵ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 13 Mar 56

¹⁷⁶ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 22 Mar 54, 13 Dec 55; Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 54

¹⁷⁷ Newbury LA, Minutes, 31 May 61, 12 Sep 62

Cornwall to give any further contributions to headquarters” because of a dispute involving the handling of a resolution submitted to the Liberal Assembly by Tavistock LA on agriculture policy.¹⁷⁸

Conversely, quota contributions improved when associations received the full benefit of federation resources. The Eastern Counties Federation employed Edward Wheeler as a travelling organiser in 1956 and Cambridgeshire LA sent £25 to the Federation in recognition of his work in the constituency. When the Federation proposed to employ another organiser the association offered to guarantee £50 of his salary, as long as it could vet any applicants.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, associations were more likely to pay their quotas if one of their officers became a federation officer or if they attracted a high profile parliamentary candidate, both of which happened at Leicester South East.¹⁸⁰

A final reason for an association not to contribute its quota was lack of awareness of the quota scheme. There is no mention in the Leeds South LA minutes of the quota scheme between 1954 and 1957, a reflection on the attitude of the Yorkshire Federation. Similarly, as noted above, Altrincham and Sale Liberals appeared not to have heard of quotas until the scheme was introduced to them by a federation official in 1960. Dundee LA was more insular still, paying no affiliation fee to the SLP between 1945 and 1958, and making no substantial contributions until 1960.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ LPO Council, Minutes, 14 Nov 59

¹⁷⁹ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 28 Apr 56, 2 Mar 57

¹⁸⁰ See Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 13 Jan 57 — when an officer was elected to the Federation executive a £25 contribution was immediately paid — and 9 Apr 63 — £100 was paid when Frank Byers agreed to become prospective parliamentary candidate (PPC)

¹⁸¹ Dundee LA, Cash Ledgers, 1948–52, 1952–65

The quota system did succeed in partly democratising the finances of the Liberal Party and some Liberal associations eagerly took up the challenge of raising £100 or more for their party headquarters.¹⁸² It was noted that as the quota scheme became better established, direct subscriptions to the LPO and the federations tended to fall, as benefactors were increasingly better targeted for funds by constituency associations.¹⁸³ The quota system could generate a momentum of its own, with the LPO exhorting constituencies to make year on year improvements in their contributions. On balance, however, the scheme was a failure and was a target for reform when Jeremy Thorpe became Treasurer of the Party in 1965.

FINANCING OF LIBERAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Reconstruction Committee's recommendation that LAs should concentrate on raising their funds from large numbers of supporters, regular social events, special events such as bazaars, and the commercial provision of services such as holidays, tours and rallies, was intended to ensure that LAs would not be unduly dependent upon one or two sources of income. Tables 8 and 9 show the sources upon which LAs relied for their income both at the time the Reconstruction Committee reported and in the early 1960s.

It is not possible to compare the finances of a representative group of Liberal associations over time, due to the limited number of surviving Liberal records. Comparisons between the two tables are possible, however, when supplemented by evidence from LA records.

¹⁸² For example Southend West LA, Minutes, 13 Nov 59, where it was agreed that the LA's quota to the LPO should be raised to £150 and paid early in 1960

¹⁸³ Annual Report and Accounts, LPO, 1964 and 1965, p17; and see North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 23 Oct 59, 18 Dec 59 for a drop in subscriptions after the adoption of the 1959 quota scheme

Table 8: Sources of Liberal Association Income, late 1940s

Liberal Association	Year	Income Source (%)								
		Subscriptions	Donations and appeals	Wards and branches	Property, investments and Liberal Clubs	Social events and sales	LPO ¹⁸⁴	Other	Total	Total (£ s d)
Altrincham and Sale ¹⁸⁵	1949	3.75	21.26	57.18	0.29	0	17.51	0.01	100	139 18 3
Chester ¹⁸⁶	1948	24.11	11.2	10.16	2.46	46.36	4.04	1.67	100	701 8 9
Dundee ¹⁸⁷	1947	1.30	8.12	0	78.89	0	0	11.61	100	875 13 9
Dunfermline ¹⁸⁸	1949	27.73	32.71	0	0.30	0	37.68	1.58	100	42 9 2
Hampstead ¹⁸⁹	1947	53.17	22.87	0	13.45	10.51	0	0	100	227 10 9
Penrith and the Border ¹⁹⁰	1949–50	11.47	19.45	52.97	0	0	0	16.11	100	925 6 10
Rugby ¹⁹¹	1947	22.69	0	0	28.80	47.03	1.48	0	100	128 9 3½
Sevenoaks ¹⁹²	1946–47	37.33	3.15	7.98	0	47.51	0	4.03	100	356 13 0

¹⁸⁴ Including Liberal News dividend

¹⁸⁵ Altrincham and Sale LA, General Council, Minutes, 17 Apr 50

¹⁸⁶ Chester LA, Financial Statement, 1948

¹⁸⁷ Dundee LA, Accounts Ledger, 1938–52

¹⁸⁸ Dunfermline LA, Minutes, 27 Mar 50

¹⁸⁹ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 23 Feb 48

¹⁹⁰ Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 2 Jun 51

¹⁹¹ Rugby LA, Minutes, 28 Apr 48

¹⁹² Sevenoaks LA, Financial Statement 1946–47

Table 9: Sources of Liberal Association Income, early 1960s

Liberal Association	Year	Income Source (%)								
		Subscriptions	Donations and appeals	Wards and branches	Property, investments and Liberal Clubs	Social events and sales	LPO	Other	Total	Total (£ s d)
Abingdon ¹⁹³	1963–64	0	3.47	96.53	0	0	0	0	100	183 4 0
Clapham ¹⁹⁴	1964	13.79	71.34	0	0	12.43	0.35	2.09	100	375 11 6
Dundee ¹⁹⁵	1963	4.29	0	0	90.15	4.35	0	1.21	100	927 9 8
Lewisham North ¹⁹⁶	1961–62	0	37.77	16.29	0	40.07	0	5.87	100	288 8 2
Newbury ¹⁹⁷	1962	0.95	2.11	28.91	62.95	3.84	0	1.24	100	792 9 4
Penrith and the Border ¹⁹⁸	1961	0	0	29.56 ¹⁹⁹	31.27	39.17	0	0	100	1,092 17 5
Southend West ²⁰⁰	1960	0	1.97	67.84	0.38	12.10	10.24	7.47	100	733 3 8
Surrey East ²⁰¹	1960–61	6.23	0	27.67	1.66	62.85	1.59	0	100	362 9 9

The first observation yielded by Tables 8 and 9 is the diverse nature of the financing of Liberal associations. Largely devoid of funding from the national party, they were left to rely on their own resources, which they accumulated in a wide variety of ways. No two Liberal associations were alike in the ways they raised funds and, consequently, in the patterns of their activity and their internal organisation. While some relied for income on Liberal Clubs, others devolved financial responsibility to ward and branch organisations,

¹⁹³ Abingdon LA, Income and Expenditure Account, 1963–64

¹⁹⁴ Clapham LA, Minutes, 22 Feb 65

¹⁹⁵ Dundee LA, Cash Ledger, 1952–65

¹⁹⁶ North Lewisham LA, Minutes, 28 Sep 62

¹⁹⁷ Newbury LA, Income and Expenditure Account, 1962

¹⁹⁸ Penrith and the Border LA, Receipts and Payments Account, 1961

¹⁹⁹ These accounts did not separate direct subscriptions and donations from branch quotas. The association minutes make it clear that the vast bulk of this income did come from the branches

²⁰⁰ Southend West LA, Minutes, 24 Feb 61

²⁰¹ Surrey East LA, Finance Committee, Minutes, 25 Apr 61

while others relied on social events, either several throughout the year or occasional large events.

Secondly, LAs appear to have become less reliant on subscriptions and donations after the publication of the Reconstruction Committee's report, which had advocated the collection of an increased number of membership fees. In fact, this is a sign that it had become more common for constituency LAs to decentralise the collection of subscriptions, and other activities, to district organisations. Subscriptions constituted a relatively insignificant proportion of total income in three associations in Table 8 and two of these, Altrincham and Sale and Penrith and the Border LAs, were supported by strong branch associations, the only associations in the table to be so assisted. Table 9 shows that this practice had become more widespread by the 1960s. Only two associations in Table 9 did not receive financial contributions from branch organisations. Dundee LA was peculiarly reliant on income from the city's Liberal Club, and will be considered later. Clapham LA is an example of an extremely weak association, which had not been able to maintain a ward-level organisation. In 1964 the association remained solvent only by borrowing money from several senior Liberals, transactions listed as donations in the table.

Liberal associations which were reliant on individual subscribers and donors were often financially insecure. Hampstead LA, in Table 8, had no ward organisation and derived over three-quarters of its income from "a small number of generous donors".²⁰² An agent was paid for by a special appeal to subscribers; a single donor paid half the cost of a leaflet introducing the prospective parliamentary candidate in 1949; and the association officers

²⁰² Hampstead LA, Minutes, 11 Feb 52

were forced to pay much of the cost of the 1950 general election campaign.²⁰³ Even despite these measures, the agent was told to pay her own wages by organising whist drives and collecting subscriptions and in July 1950 she was informed that her position depended entirely on the outcome of the LA's St. Leger sweepstake.²⁰⁴

Other associations were particularly dependent upon one Liberal notable, often made president in recognition of his financial input. Charles Roberts, President of Penrith and the Border LA, personally paid the wages of two of the association's employees in the 1940s and between 1949 and 1958 donated more than £2,000 to the association.²⁰⁵ Even after his death, in 1959, Roberts' estate paid off the LA's overdraft, of which he had been guarantor. It was reported in 1965 that Gerald Whitmarsh, during his period as Liberal candidate for St. Ives from the late 1950s onwards, had paid £2,000 into the LA, including £40 per month to pay for a full-time agent.²⁰⁶ On a smaller scale, C. A. Newport's £62 donation to Leicester South East LA in 1951 was the association's only source of income during that year.²⁰⁷

Thirdly, social events were the most important sources of revenue for most Liberal associations in both the 1940s and the 1960s. A wide variety of socials was organised by LAs, from the obligatory whist drives and jumble sales to the more exotic car rallies and

²⁰³ Ibid., 7 Nov 46, 5 Dec 49, 13 Apr 50

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 23 Feb 48, 18 May 50, 13 Jul 50

²⁰⁵ Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 2 Feb 46, 27 Jan 48, 29 Jan 49, 29 Apr 50, 22 Sep 51, 4 Jul 53, 16 Jan 54, 27 Nov 54, 19 Jan 57, 27 Sep 58, 7 Nov 59, 9 Apr 60. The association's accounts do not include salaries paid directly by Roberts, understating his influence and overstating the strength of the branch system in the LA

²⁰⁶ LPO Papers, Memorandum from P. Bessell to J. Thorpe and others, 8 Jan 65 (reference 17/3/115)

²⁰⁷ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 18 Feb 52

gymkhanas. The recommendation that LAs should organise commercial holidays and tours was rarely taken up, although the London Liberal Party did organise trips to Wembley ice shows throughout the 1950s which showed modest profits.

Not all LAs saw the value of social events. Hampstead LA decided in 1951 to stop holding all social events, except for an annual garden party, bazaar and prize draw. The association felt that small-scale socials detracted from political work without earning sufficient profit to make them worthwhile.²⁰⁸ Within two years the LA reversed its decision and decided to start running a Liberal bookshop and a coffee stall outside a local cinema.²⁰⁹

Fourthly, a small number of Liberal associations derived a significant proportion of their income from property — Liberal clubs and halls, usually of Victorian origin.²¹⁰ Liberal halls provided local associations with a meeting place and permitted them to earn an income from renting rooms out to other voluntary organisations and from holding regular social events. The buildings were frequently in need of repair and decoration and Liberal activists sometimes regarded them more as a burden than a blessing.

Liberal clubs were, potentially, a more significant source of LA income than Liberal halls, but the close connection between Dundee LA and Liberal Club, obvious from Tables 8 and 9, was unusual. The National Federation of Liberal Clubs was represented on the Liberal Party Council and LAs were encouraged to maintain contacts with their local clubs, but

²⁰⁸ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 1 Mar 51, 20 Mar 51

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 Jul 53

²¹⁰ For example J. F. P. Blondel, “The Political Structure of Reading” (unpublished B. Litt thesis, Oxford University, 1955) p216 on the income earned for the Liberal Party by Reading and County Liberal Club after 1945

these contacts were half-hearted at best. The Liberal clubs were approached for funds at election times, but middle-class Liberal activists were not usually interested in participating in the clubs' "beer and billiards".²¹¹ Leeds Liberal Federation had a relatively close relationship with the city's Liberal clubs, but there was evidence of tension between the clubs and Liberal activists, particularly in 1954 when representatives of the clubs complained that they were not made to feel welcome at meetings of the Federation's Executive Committee.²¹² Several Liberal organisations benefited from the sale of clubs.²¹³ Even when there had been no contact between association and club for many years, LAs often remained legally entitled to the proceeds of the sales of property. The LPO employed a solicitor to advise associations on how to get hold of the money to which they were entitled in such circumstances. Newbury WLA fought a protracted legal action in the 1950s, as a result of which Newbury LA finally received £6,863 8s 0d from the sale of the town's Liberal club.²¹⁴ The LA had not been in existence when the club was initially sold, but a clause in the deeds insisted that the money be handed over to the association if it were formed as much as five years after the sale. Leicester Liberal Party received £1,742 0s 10d after a similarly complicated case; the last trustee of the city's club had been a National Liberal and his solicitors were obliged to make extensive enquiries into the political affiliations of other club members before finally paying the money to the Liberal Party.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Interview, Leslie Anderson

²¹² See Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 17 Mar 54 on tension and 1 Feb 41, 8 Jul 46, 9 Sep 46, 30 Aug 48, 18 Mar 53, 22 Jan 57, 20 May 58, 19 Jan 60, 21 Mar 61, 20 Jun 61, 26 Sep 61, 28 May 64 on cooperation, or calls for further cooperation, between the Federation and Liberal clubs

²¹³ For example, £380 received by the North West Liberal Federation from the sale of Dalton Liberal Club — North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 15 Jul 49

²¹⁴ Newbury LA, Property File, letter regarding legal action, 23 Feb 60

²¹⁵ Leicester Liberal Party, Minutes, 6 Jul 61

It will be seen from both Tables 8 and 9 that the LPO contributed little to the annual running costs of its local associations either in the 1940s or in the 1960s.²¹⁶ It is clear that the financing of the LPO and of the local associations were separate issues in the 1940s. The intention of the Reconstruction Committee was to connect the two, by insisting that the local associations should feel obliged to contribute to the running costs of the Party's headquarters. Prior to 1960, except for Liberal News dividends, the only income LAs received from headquarters was related to parliamentary election expenses. In 1962, a new scheme was started to channel funds into LAs which had a chance of winning parliamentary elections, in order to help them build up for the general election. The Special or Direct Aid scheme was also intended to reassert the control of the parliamentary party over the running of certain key constituencies.²¹⁷ The ways in which the Special Aid scheme could influence candidate selection will be considered below.

Candidate Selection

Prior to the reorganisation of the Party in 1947, the Liberals relied on the LCA for the "interviewing, selecting and placing" of candidates.²¹⁸ The Reconstruction Committee concluded that "we agree that the traditional interest of the leader of the parliamentary party in the selection and vetting of candidates must be maintained, but feel that the responsibility for the final placing of candidates and the organisation of their constituencies

²¹⁶ The LPO cash received by Dunfermline LA in Table 8, consisted of a £10 "starter" grant to help found the association, given by the SLP, and income from the sale of the Liberal News

²¹⁷ See p96

²¹⁸ "Coats off for the Future!", paragraph 18, p5

must fall upon the Party Organisation working through the Federations”.²¹⁹ This was a recognition of reality in the constituency associations rather than a radical new direction for the Party to take. As Rasmussen has described, an LPO committee was established in order to interview prospective candidates, although often after, rather than before, they were selected to fight by constituency associations, and this committee was expanded in size and importance during the mid-1950s.²²⁰

Constituency associations were advised by the LPO of the correct means of adopting a parliamentary candidate by a series of booklets published during the 1945–64 period.²²¹ Associations had first to decide whether or not they were ready for the financial and organisational burdens fighting a parliamentary election entailed. No mention of this issue was made in 1950, when constituency chairmen were advised to look out for potential candidates at all times. In 1958 a proviso was added that the constituency association and its branches should be in a “credible state of organisation” before the search began and in 1963, each association was told to “make up its mind when the right moment has arrived”, bearing in mind that “only serious organisational or financial weakness should prevent election contests”.

The change of emphasis reflected the debate within the Liberal Party about whether general elections should be fought on a broad or narrow front, and also illustrated the

²¹⁹ Ibid., paragraph 53, p12

²²⁰ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp209–12. Of Rasmussen’s sample of Liberal candidates, only 40 per cent were interviewed at headquarters before being adopted

²²¹ Fighting for Liberalism (LPO, [1950]), pp17–18; Effective Organising (LPO, 1958), pp61–2; and Effective Organising (LPO, 1963), pp63–5, to which subsequent references here to 1950, 1958 and 1963 all refer

concerns of senior party members, particularly parliamentarians, about the embarrassing results obtained by candidates standing in constituencies almost devoid of Liberal organisation. Arthur Holt was particularly instrumental in emphasising the desirability for constituencies to fight parliamentary elections only when they possessed an effective organisation, ample finance and a good candidate. As Rasmussen noted, however, “the local constituency associations are able to balk whatever decision is taken by the leaders of either the mass party or the parliamentary party”.²²² The LPO Executive Committee noted in 1961 that around one-third of the 100 potential candidates interviewed by headquarters every year was rejected, but “some of these candidates were nonetheless accepted by constituency associations”.²²³

Secondly, LA executive committees were advised to establish a selection sub-committee, which would draw up a shortlist from which the final decision would be made. Again, the LPO’s guidance on this matter changed during the 1950s. In 1950, LA chairmen were requested to “keep on the look-out for anyone likely to suit: a local man of good standing always has tremendous advantage over an outsider”.²²⁴ No mention was made of the LCA or of any headquarters input into the selection process. In 1958, chairmen were told that “the officers should start the search at home. There is very probably a local person who would fulfil all the requirements, is known and liked in the area and is able to devote the necessary time to being a candidate. Should there be no such person the federation or HQ will be able to suggest persons ... In the interests of the candidate, the association and the Party, a potential candidate found locally should be referred to the federation before

²²² Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp98–9

²²³ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 11 Nov 61

²²⁴ Fighting for Liberalism, p18

adoption, so that arrangements may be made with the Chief Whip's Office for the usual enquiries and interviews."²²⁵ This clearly indicated that headquarters would provide associations with a candidate only in the last resort. Five years later, however, associations were informed that "the selection committee should begin its work by getting in touch with headquarters who may be able to suggest several names of possible candidates. The LPO Candidates' Committee (of which the Chief Whip is chairman) is responsible for keeping an approved list of potential candidates ... To this list should certainly be added names of local people who are suggested ... Any such local people ... should be interviewed by the Party's Candidate's Committee".²²⁶ In 1963, therefore, headquarters indicated that it would be the first source of parliamentary candidates for any association.

Thirdly, in both 1958 and 1963 more emphasis was placed on introducing the prospective candidate to the association than vice versa.²²⁷ Mention was made of the need to check the "standing and qualifications" of the candidate as well as of the fact that he was "likely to be sympathetic to the problems of the constituency and its voters", but it was emphasised that "those interviewed have a right to be informed frankly about the state of the organisation in the constituency, including the financial situation". In both years it was stated that "it is no longer customary to expect a candidate to contribute to Association funds".²²⁸

²²⁵ Effective Organising, 1958, p61

²²⁶ Effective Organising, 1963, p64

²²⁷ The details of the selection procedure were not mentioned in 1950

²²⁸ Effective Organising, 1958, p61 and 1963, p65. Rasmussen concluded that "in a good number of cases being a Liberal parliamentary candidate clearly involved considerably greater personal expense than being a candidate for either of the major parties", The Liberal Party, p210

This review of the advice given by the LPO to constituency associations shows that the relationship between the LCA and LAs changed with reference to candidate selection during the 1945–64 period and, as might be anticipated, also depended upon the personnel and organisation of the individual association. A study of the mechanics of candidate selection from the viewpoint of individual associations and federations, examining in particular the instances of conflict between these bodies, will highlight the nature of that relationship.²²⁹

THE DECISION TO CONTEST

For the most part, LAs decided themselves whether or not to fight general elections, with financial considerations and the availability or otherwise of a suitable candidate being the most significant factors in their decisions. There are cases of the Liberal Party headquarters seeking to influence the decisions of constituency associations about contesting parliamentary elections, but it was widely recognised that the final word on such matters rested with LAs.²³⁰

Both headquarters and the federations maintained unofficial lists of those seats which it was felt Liberal candidates should contest at each general election. J. McLaughlin of the LPO told the North West Federation in January 1958 that the national party wished to see Darwen, Rossendale, Southport, Wallasey, Stretford, Salford West and Manchester Moss

²²⁹ Although the federations had no formal role in candidate selection, they were the “eyes and ears” of the LCA in the regions and it was expected that they would help the LCA coordinate candidate placement and suggest that potential candidates in each area be interviewed by the LCA secretary

²³⁰ For example, see Conservative Party Papers, memoranda by I. MacLeod, 1955, and O. Poole, 9 Apr 57, on talks with the Liberal Party about the possibility of pacts in certain seats, reference CCO20/2

Side contested at the next general election, although in the event only Rossendale was fought in 1959.²³¹ The North West Federation urged Altrincham and Sale LA to fight the 1945 election and Southport LA to fight in 1950 and 1951.²³² The Scottish Liberal Party was insistent that Dunfermline LA should be contested in both 1950 and 1955, presumably because of the presence of a National Liberal and Conservative organisation in the constituency. Its efforts to persuade the local Liberals to adopt a candidate were thwarted by opposing efforts by the National Liberals to ensure that they benefited from a free run against the sitting Labour MP.²³³ The SLP was similarly keen in 1962 for Dunbartonshire West LA to nominate a candidate and submitted three suggestions for the association's consideration; nevertheless, the seat was not contested in 1964.²³⁴

Headquarters and the federations would sometimes instruct LAs about which seats should or should not be contested, with varying degrees of success. The Liberal Party's Director General, H. F. P. Harris, informed the Leicester Liberal organisations in 1953 that one seat in the city should be contested by the Party at the next general election. The North West division was chosen by the Leicester Liberal Party as the best prospect but went uncontested in 1955. Leicester South East LA repudiated this arrangement after the general

²³¹ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 17 Jan 58

²³² Southport LA, Minutes, 15 Dec 49, 20 Jun 50, 11 Jul 50, 13 Mar 51, 24 Apr 51, 3 Feb 53, 6 Aug 53, 19 Nov 53, 17 Dec 53; Altrincham and Sale LA, Minutes, 28 May 45. Altrincham and Sale was not contested by a Liberal in 1945; Southport was contested in both 1950 and 1951

²³³ Dunfermline LA, Minutes, 10 Oct 49, 28 Nov 49, 12 Dec 49, 9 Jan 50, 13 Feb 50, 27 Feb 50, 17 Dec 51, 11 Feb 52, 26 Mar 52, and Papers, Letter from J. Carson, SLP, to Mr. Heyhow, Dunfermline LA, 9 Nov 49; and Interview, David Marcus

²³⁴ Dunbartonshire West LA, Minutes, 8 Oct 62, 5 Nov 62. Curiously, the LA Executive Committee voted 7 to 5 at the former meeting that any PPC must be a member of the Liberal Party

election but could not find a suitable candidate for the 1959 election.²³⁵ The South East London Liberal Council decided in August 1951 that Lewisham North would not be fought by a Liberal at the forthcoming election, apparently without influence from the London Liberal Party; the LA finally acknowledged this decision days before the election took place.²³⁶ Leeds Liberal Federation played an important role in ensuring that there was a Liberal candidate for one of the city's seats in the 1955 general election, although its call for a candidate to be adopted in one seat for the 1951 election went unheeded.²³⁷

Following the 1959 election, Brian Ashmore deferred his decision to contest Penrith and the Border again until the North West Federation indicated their preferred strategy for contests in Cumberland. The Federation had suggested that Penrith and the Border LA concentrate on helping develop Carlisle LA rather than fighting again, and the Liberal organiser in Penrith and the Border described the LA as suffering from a "poverty of will" with regard to electioneering. Ashmore was eventually readopted, only to be deselected in an acrimonious episode in 1963, after which he was adopted at Carlisle.²³⁸

Liberals were not reluctant to defend the right of constituency associations to decide for themselves which seats should be fought in general elections, regardless of the views of

²³⁵ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 5 Oct 53, 18 Jan 54, 6 Jun 55, 11 Sep 56, 14 Sep 59. Note that a Mr. Bidgood was proposed as a potential PPC immediately after joining the LA, illustrating the Party's paucity of talent, 18 Jul 55

²³⁶ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 23 Aug 51, 8 Oct 51

²³⁷ Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 24 Sep 51, 15 Nov 54, 6 Jan 55, 28 Feb 55, 14 Mar 55, 22 Jun 55

²³⁸ Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 5 Oct 61, 16 Jun 62, 19 Sep 63, 27 Sep 63; Ashmore Papers, letters from the Secretary, Carlisle LA to B. Ashmore, 28 Feb 62, A. Powell to B. Ashmore, 13 Mar 62, B. Ashmore to F. Phillips, 10 Jun 62, J. Howe to B. Ashmore, 28 Sep 63, C. Wood to B. Ashmore, 30 Sep 63, from five Penrith and the Border LA members to the Executive Committee (undated), E. Dyer to B. Ashmore, 13 Jun 64 and 23 Jun 64, P. Borrow to B. Ashmore 15 Jul 64, and F. Phillips to Carlisle LA members, 9 Sep 64 and Penrith and the Border LA, press release, 12 Jun 64; and Interview, Brian Ashmore

headquarters. In 1951 Fulham West LA passed a resolution to that effect, presumably after a suggestion that Eric Walcot-Bather should stand down after polling just 1,949 votes in the 1950 election. He fought again and polled 702 votes fewer in 1951.²³⁹ The Executive Committee of the North West Federation in June 1950 voted down a motion which proposed that the national party should be entrusted with the task of deciding which seats should be fought in general elections.

There are several examples of open conflict between constituency associations, federations and the national party over the question of whether or not to contest a general election. Occasionally, these were connected to exceptional circumstances. After the 1959 general election the MP for the Cities of London and Westminster, and former Conservative minister, Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, was elected as Speaker of the House of Commons. The Liberal association readopted Derek Monsey as prospective candidate, leading to the resignation of the LA's President, Lord Rea, as well as that of a Vice President, Mr Bute Hews, who complained of "socialist infiltration". Jo Grimond indicated that he wished the convention whereby the Speaker's seat was unopposed by the major parties to continue but admitted that he could not prevent a Liberal candidature going ahead. A Liberal candidate, John Derry, did oppose Hylton-Foster in 1964.²⁴⁰ In contrast, the Liberal leadership was able to ensure that no Liberal candidates were adopted for the by-elections in Bristol South East which followed Tony Benn's accession to the peerage in 1960 and his subsequent battle to renounce his viscounty.²⁴¹

²³⁹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 14 Sep 51. The Liberal poll was 4.9 per cent in 1950 and 3.2 per cent in 1951

²⁴⁰ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 17 Dec 59, 16 Oct 60, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 2 Nov 59

²⁴¹ Pottle (ed.), Daring to Hope, pp237, 272

More common were instances of clashes between the personalities which could occasionally dominate Liberal associations and federation and national officials. One source of conflict was the ruling, easily evaded, that an affiliated LA needed 50 members in order to appoint delegates to the Liberal Assembly.²⁴² The London Liberal Party used this rule to challenge the credentials of affiliated LAs on a number of occasions and was engaged in long-running disputes with renegade LAs at Barons Court, Clapham and Islington East during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁴³

Barons Court LA was dominated by Simon Knott who had first become involved in local politics in Hammersmith during the mid-1950s. The LLP refused to endorse his candidature in the 1959 general election because the LA was not properly constituted. After polling just 1,766 votes (4.6 per cent) in 1959, as an Independent Liberal, Knott remained active. There were regular complaints made by Hammersmith Liberals to the LLP during 1962 that Knott was holding back the development of the LA by acting as his own agent, keeping all of the association's records and minimising contact with the Federation. Knott, for his part, felt that the local Liberals lacked ambition and that the LLP was run by an ageing clique, out of touch with political reality. The LLP Executive Committee openly disassociated itself from Knott when he ran a "Keep Britain Out" of Europe campaign in Liberal News, describing himself as a Liberal PPC, in May 1962.²⁴⁴ In September, however, the LPO accepted Barons Court LA's affiliation to the Party, much

²⁴² Constitution of the Liberal Party (LPO, 1952) clause 6(iv)

²⁴³ See London Liberal Party, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 13 Feb 45 re. Islington West LA; 13 Dec 49 re. Hackney North LA

²⁴⁴ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 28 Apr 62

to the dismay of the Federation. Knott fought the 1964 general election as an official Liberal candidate, almost doubling his vote.²⁴⁵

Whereas the Barons Court dispute was due entirely to the disagreements between Knott and fellow Liberals both in Hammersmith and in Victoria Street, the conflicts between the LLP and Liberals in Islington East and Clapham were more deep-rooted and led to legal action. A dispute began when the Liberal organiser in Islington East, Alan Lomas, described himself as the PPC in 1962. This claim was refuted by the LLP which suspected Lomas had not been properly selected. Attempts by the LLP to hold a formal selection meeting failed and the LA split, but Lomas appears to have been backed by the majority of local activists. A court battle over control of the LA's assets commenced and Lomas published a newsletter, Viewpoint, in contempt of court, which launched a vicious attack on the officers of the LLP. Refused official Liberal backing, Lomas called himself a "New Liberal" and, advocating a mix of nationalist, anti-European right-wing policies, formed an alliance with David Russell, former Liberal PPC for Clapham. Lomas called on several Liberal PPCs in London to resign and attempted to create a rival Liberal organisation in the capital. The LLP made special efforts to ensure that reputable candidates fought both seats, suggesting to Clapham LA that they adopt Laura Grimond. In the end, the LLP sponsored Peter Lyden-Cowan and Joel Freedman to contest the Clapham and Islington East seats in 1964; both out-polled the renegades and the New Liberals disappeared from view.²⁴⁶ This episode highlights the weakness of individual LAs and of the candidate

²⁴⁵ He polled 2,821 votes, 8.4 per cent of the total. London Liberal Party, Minutes, 17 May 62, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 26 Feb 62, 12 Mar 62, 9 Apr 62, 24 Sep 62; also Interview, Simon Knott

²⁴⁶ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 27 Sep 62, 15 Nov 62, 24 Jan 63, 28 Mar 63, 17 Oct 63, 21 May 64, 18 Jun 64, 16 Jul 64, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 29 Jul 63, 26 Aug 63, 27 Jan 64, 13 Jul 64; see also election literature including Viewpoint and Clapham LA, Minutes, 15 Jan 63, 28 Jan 63

recruitment process. Lomas had been a member of all three political parties and was clearly wholly unsuitable for a position of responsibility in any. Russell was unsympathetic to most aspects of current Liberal policy and was selected as PPC for Clapham only after offering to guarantee his own deposit.²⁴⁷ Both men owed their prominence to their ability to impress small groups of active Liberals. Once able to claim their Liberal candidatures to the press and public, they were able to discredit the LLP and, in the case of Clapham LA, undermine the local association.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

In spite of the official line, approaches by Liberal associations to headquarters or to the federations for potential parliamentary candidates were the exception rather than the rule during the 1945–64 period. Numerous instances are recorded of candidates being selected without any recorded influence registered by either the LCA or the federations, although informal input cannot be ruled out and the candidates are likely to have been interviewed after selection in most cases. The experiences of Enfield West LA can be regarded as typical of a Liberal association actively seeking a parliamentary candidate during the early 1950s. The LA made two approaches for local candidates before turning to headquarters for assistance in 1949. The LCA's initial suggestion was adopted but subsequently resigned; the same happened with their second suggestion, and the seat went without a Liberal contestant in the 1950 election. Following these set-backs, the association again turned to local suggestions and only made a further approach to the LCA when these came to nothing. The LCA's recommendation of T. D. Lucy proved fruitless and throughout

²⁴⁷ Clapham LA, Minutes, 5 Sep 61

1952 the association's officers were actively seeking a local candidate. Another approach to the LCA proved unsatisfactory and by 1954 the LA's chairman was again making personal approaches to prospective candidates.²⁴⁸ Similarly, East Surrey LA used local contacts to identify potential candidates prior to the 1959 election, including exploring family connections.²⁴⁹ In 1961, after the resignation of Ken Vaus, the LCA was reported to be aware of the vacancy, but another PPC was found without reference to headquarters.²⁵⁰

A significant number of the candidates who fought as Liberals in the 1950 election did so without the knowledge or approval of the Party's headquarters or federations. In 1949 Edward Martell, of the LCA, informed the London Liberal Party that, in order to be adopted, Liberal candidates were required to supply references, fill in a questionnaire and "be the subject of other enquiries", and associations needed to satisfy guidelines drafted by the Federation which were primarily to do with their financial position. In December 1949 32 PPCs were in place in London, yet when the election took place in February 1950 all 43 seats in the capital were fought. The Federation Secretary resigned, and an organiser in south east London was dismissed, after it was revealed that neither the President nor the Chairman of the LLP had known of the late candidatures.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Enfield West LA, Minutes, 13 Dec 48, 10 Jan 49, 11 Apr 49, 23 May 49, 12 Sep 49, 14 Nov 49, 13 Feb 50, 17 Apr 50, 15 May 50, 11 Dec 50, 22 Jan 51, 9 Apr 51, 11 Jun 51, 14 Jan 52, 18 Feb 52, 17 Mar 52, 29 Apr 52, 23 Jun 52, 15 Sep 52, 17 Nov 52, 28 Jan 54

²⁴⁹ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 28 Nov 56, 16 Jan 57, 13 Feb 57, 16 Jul 57, 11 Sep 57, 25 Nov 57

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 16 May 61, 15 Aug 61, 16 Oct 62, 20 Nov 62, 23 Nov 62

²⁵¹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 17 Nov 49, 15 Dec 49, 16 Mar 50

When LAs did approach headquarters for candidates, they did so with a variety of requests. Mostly, LAs requested the names of one or more potential candidates for them to approach.²⁵² Occasionally, however, LAs were more specific. Stockport LA indicated in 1946 its desire to adopt two Liberals to contest the next general election, one a prominent national figure, in order to show its resolution to do battle with the Conservative and Labour Parties and to generate increased income. The North West Federation approached Sir Felix Brunner on behalf of the LA, but the division of the constituency as a result of the Representation of the People Act 1949 thwarted these moves and neither of the resulting two LAs attracted a prominent candidate at the 1950 election.²⁵³ Hampstead LA wanted a high profile candidate ready to make a substantial financial contribution to the association in 1945, but received no encouragement from headquarters.²⁵⁴ In an unusual reversal of the normal procedure, Lewisham North LA approached headquarters in 1950 with a list of prospective candidates for their approval.²⁵⁵

There are numerous cases of LAs being required to choose parliamentary candidates in isolation from the national party, contrary to the advice they often received from headquarters. Walthamstow West LA declared in 1950 that “the question of putting up a candidate would to a large extent be governed by headquarters”. An approach to the LLP for a candidate went unanswered for over five months in 1951. A request for information about a Mr. James of Stoke Newington went unanswered by the LCA in 1952, and that

²⁵² For example, Glasgow Hillhead LA, Minutes, 5 May 45, 30 May 45; Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 14 Oct 57, 28 Oct 57, 7 Jan 59; Harborough LA, Minutes, 27 Jun 49; Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 50; Horncastle LA, Minutes, 22 Aug 61, 23 Oct 61; Rugby LA, Minutes, 15 Jun 53

²⁵³ Stockport LA, Minutes, 1 Aug 46

²⁵⁴ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 4 May 45, 28 Mar 46. No Liberal candidate fought Hampstead in 1945

²⁵⁵ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 27 Aug 50

body informed the LA in 1955 that “all available PPCs had gone”.²⁵⁶ The seat was not contested by the Liberals in 1951 and 1955. Harwich LA was informed in 1957 that there were no candidates available for adoption from headquarters.²⁵⁷ Cambridgeshire LA’s requests for candidates from the LCA went unheeded in 1948, 1953 and 1954, and the association turned to local applicants as a result.²⁵⁸ Two approaches to the West Midlands Federation by Stratford-upon-Avon LA for possible candidates in 1950 appear to have been rebuffed.²⁵⁹ When Faversham LA was relaunched in 1962 Diana Stephenson, Secretary of the Home Counties Federation, explained to the Executive Committee that it was best for associations rather than headquarters to place parliamentary candidates. Consequently, J. C. Varley was adopted in April 1962 and only sought formal approval from the LCA after that date; after his resignation, the association advertised in the local press for a replacement.²⁶⁰

The Liberal Party’s headquarters concentrated its resources on finding high calibre candidates for certain key seats, particularly those with a recent history of Liberal parliamentary representation. The influence of the English Liberal organisations extended into Scotland in this regard, despite the constitutional separation of the English and Scottish parties. The LCA recommended George Honeyman as a potential parliamentary candidate for a Dundee seat in 1948, although John Junor, a suggestion of the SLP, was

²⁵⁶ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 26 Jun 50, 28 Nov 50, 2 Jan 51, 17 Dec 51, 4 Nov 52, 19 Oct 55. In this case, the LLP introduced a Mr. Tyrell to the association in November, Minutes, 9 Nov 55

²⁵⁷ Harwich LA, Minutes, 29 Mar 57

²⁵⁸ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 1 May 48, 3 Jul 48, 26 Feb 49, 24 Oct 53, 6 Mar 54, 28 Aug 54, 30 Apr 55

²⁵⁹ Stratford-upon-Avon LA, Minutes, 27 Apr 50, 12 Jun 50

²⁶⁰ Faversham LA, Minutes, 27 Mar 62, 3 Apr 62, 1 Feb 63, 8 Mar 63

later adopted for the Western division.²⁶¹ The LCA also maintained contact with Liberals when it wished to find suitable constituencies to contest. Aubrey Herbert, when Secretary of the LCA, contacted Brian Ashmore while he was still at university in 1947, to enquire about his availability at the next general election.²⁶² Albert Ingham, Secretary of the Yorkshire Federation, strongly encouraged Ashmore to fight a Yorkshire constituency in 1951, even offering financial assistance if he could do so.²⁶³ Headquarters offered informal advice to favoured candidates about where they should fight. Ingham praised Ashmore's decision to stand down in Sheffield Hallam before the 1951 election and Tommy Nudds, of the LCA, twice urged Ashmore to contest Carlisle.²⁶⁴ The LCA also turned to candidates for advice on the names of possible candidates in constituencies about which they were knowledgeable. Nudds contacted Ashmore about the placing of candidates in Whitehaven and Carlisle, writing in 1962 that "I have heard of a retired Methodist parson, living on the coast at Berwick, who is said to be a powerful speaker, and is aged about 63 ... I am wondering whether [he] ... would be the sort for Carlisle. He does not sound ideal, but I would like to have your views".²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Dundee LA Papers, letter from John Carson, SLP, to Leslie B. Weatherhead, Secretary, Dundee LA, 20 Feb 48, reference GD/DLA/5/1. Interestingly, for a division which had been represented by a Liberal MP as recently as 1945, Weatherhead had warned Lady Glen-Coats of the SLP in a letter of 5 May 1947 that "it would be very difficult for us to give [Dingle Foot] a good fight ... it would take at least two years to convert the present skeleton into a fighting mass", reference GD/DLA/5/22

²⁶² Ashmore Papers, letter from A. Herbert to B. Ashmore, 19 Dec 47 and see also letter from A. Worsley to B. Ashmore, 14 Sep 48. The LCA secured Basil Wigoder's nomination as Liberal candidate for Bournemouth while he was still at Oxford, in 1942 — Interview, Basil Wigoder

²⁶³ Ashmore Papers, letters from A. Ingham to B. Ashmore 12 Sep 51, 20 Sep 51, 17 Oct 51

²⁶⁴ Ashmore Papers, letters from T. Nudds to B. Ashmore 10 May 62, 11 Jun 64

²⁶⁵ Ashmore Papers, letter from T. Nudds to B. Ashmore, 12 Oct 62

Headquarters also became involved when a Liberal candidature was perceived as the best means of tackling any remaining National Liberal or independent Liberal elements in a constituency.²⁶⁶ This consideration explains the involvement of the SLP in backing David Murray as Liberal candidate for the Western Isles in 1951. Murray contested the seat as a Scottish Home Rule candidate in 1950, opposing the official Liberal, Huntly Sinclair, but polling a meagre 425 votes (2.7 per cent). Prior to the 1950 poll Murray had requested official Liberal backing, arguing that Sinclair was a right-winger chosen by the local association solely because of the financial contribution he could make to his election expenses. When that backing was refused Murray claimed nevertheless to have the personal support of Lady Glen-Coats, leading to a heated dispute between Murray and the SLP.²⁶⁷ Despite this episode, and Murray's poor poll in 1950, Lady Glen-Coats wrote to Councillor D. Stewart, regarded as a staunch local Liberal, in October 1950 to request that Murray be adopted as the official Liberal candidate. The SLP also backed Murray with a £250 grant and supported his efforts after the 1951 election to revive the LA and stymie the newly-formed National Liberal organisation.²⁶⁸ In 1945 the London Liberal Party insisted that Bermondsey West be fought, against the wishes of the LCA.²⁶⁹ It is likely that the LLP's attitude was related to the strength of the Liberal Nationals in Bermondsey West a decade previously.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ See p74 for the situation in Dunfermline

²⁶⁷ Murray Papers, letters from D. Murray to Lady Glen-Coats 21 Jan 50, 4 Feb 50, 6 Mar 50 and from Lady Glen-Coats to D. Murray 25 Jan 50, 8 Feb 50, 19 Feb 50

²⁶⁸ Murray Papers, letters from D. Stewart to D. Murray 20 Oct 50 and from J. Carson to D. Murray 16 Oct 51 and 12 Nov 51

²⁶⁹ London Liberal Party, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 20 Jun 45

²⁷⁰ The Liberal Nationals lost in a straight fight against Labour in Bermondsey West in 1935 by nearly 5,000 votes. In 1945 the Liberal candidate polled 903 votes, 5.86 per cent of the total

Headquarters did, occasionally, intervene to alter the selection decisions made by LAs. In 1945, Harold Glanville, Chairman of the London Liberal Party, is recorded as having asked L. G. Bowman to stand down as PPC for St. Pancras South East on the grounds of age, a request to which he assented. The national party had to operate with some subtlety if it wished to influence candidate selection, given the traditional concern of LAs to protect their autonomy. LAs did not react positively to overt intervention: even at Clapham in 1964, when the Liberals faced opposition from an independent Liberal candidate, the local association complained bitterly to the LLP about their “interference” in the selection process.²⁷¹

Similar sentiments were expressed in Aberdeen when the SLP became embroiled in efforts to prevent Major Tom Adam becoming Liberal candidate for Aberdeen North in 1962. For many years prior to 1962 Aberdeen LA had been the body controlling all Liberal activity in the city, including parliamentary candidate selection. Liberal activity, however insignificant, had generally been confined to the south of the city but in February 1962 an active Liberal association was formed in the northern half. Several Aberdeen Liberals regarded the northern executive, and especially Adam, as unsuitable and this opinion was shared by the officers of the SLP.²⁷² At the Aberdeen North LA’s inaugural Executive Committee meeting Adam was adopted as Liberal PPC, in contravention of the constitution

²⁷¹ Clapham LA Papers, letters from M. Terry to S. J. Beaver 2 Jan 63, 4 Jan 63 and from S. J. Beaver to M. Terry, 3 Jan 63

²⁷² Esslemont Papers, Aberdeen North LA Newsletter, No. 1, Mar 62, letters from K. W. Ruddiman to Aberdeen LA Executive, undated, A. Mitchell to Dr. M. Esslemont, 23 Feb 62, H. S. Corlett to Dr. M. Esslemont, 26 Feb 62, T. Houghton to Dr. M. Esslemont, 17 Apr 62 and S. Wright to Dr. M. Esslemont, 22 Jul 62 (MS3037/1/1/6/4,7; MS3037/1/4/6/b–c; MS3037/1/4/15/b; MS3037/1/4/20/c)

of the city-wide Liberal authority.²⁷³ This aggravated Liberals in the south of Aberdeen, but the northern executive countered with a motion arguing that candidate selection should be the responsibility of constituency associations with external involvement limited to approval of the LA's shortlist by the SLP.²⁷⁴ Discussion of the constitutional relationship between the constituency and city Liberal organisations continued throughout 1963 but tensions dissolved during 1964 as the weakness of liberalism in Aberdeen became apparent.²⁷⁵ There was no Liberal candidate in either Aberdeen constituency in the 1964 election.

THE DIALOGUE WITH CANDIDATES

LAs' decisions to fight elections were influenced by the demands imposed by prospective candidates themselves. Lancelot Spicer insisted in 1946 that Walthamstow West LA build up a £400 fighting fund and that his contribution to the election fight should not exceed £100.²⁷⁶ A. W. Pim, selected in place of Spicer in 1948, insisted that the LA fight every local election contest and appoint a full-time agent. These demands were not met, the bulk of the expenditure incurred during the 1950 election fell upon Pim, and he left the constituency complaining that more backing was required from the LA.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ Aberdeen North LA, Minutes, 22 Mar 62 and Esslemont Papers, Rules of Aberdeen LA, clause XVI, 23 Jan 59 (MS3037/2/35/a-b; MS3037/1/1/4/b)

²⁷⁴ Aberdeen North LA, Minutes, 19 Feb 63 and Esslemont Papers, letter from H. S. Corlett to Dr. M. Esslemont, 20 Feb 63 (MS3037/2/43; MS3037/1/4/25)

²⁷⁵ See Aberdeen LA, Minutes, 5 Feb 63, 13 May 63, 27 May 63, 16 Sep 64, when the city LA held funds of only £12 0s 13d (MS3037/2/8, 9/a-b, 10/a-d, 11/a-c, 19)

²⁷⁶ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 2 Oct 46

²⁷⁷ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 13 Sep 48, 14 Feb 49, 9 Jan 50, 2 Mar 50

Candidates' demands on their local associations could be considerable. When Frank Byers was approached to fight Leicester South East prior to the 1964 general election, he insisted that the LA appoint an agent, establish a fighting fund, acquire a permanent headquarters, set up operative ward associations and raise an income of £2,000 per annum. These conditions were accepted by the LA following a promise of a £400 grant from the LPO; when that money was withdrawn the LA was forced to relieve Byers of his candidature.²⁷⁸ Kenneth Brookes requested 400 workers and 30 cars for use during the 1959 general election campaign in Lewisham North when adopted in May of that year; this request almost certainly had little effect on the association, which only formally decided to contest the seat seventeen days before polling day.²⁷⁹ W. I. Akst, after polling just 4,010 votes (9.47 per cent) at Harwich in 1955, set membership and income targets for the LA as well as indicating the level of political activity he expected in various regards; in October 1956 he resigned as PPC.²⁸⁰

In 1948, the Conservative Party conference accepted the recommendations of the Maxwell Fyfe committee which included that parliamentary candidates should be proscribed from contributing more than £50 per annum to their local Conservative association. This proposal aimed to broaden the range of candidate selection by Conservative associations and to encourage associations to seek finance from a wider variety of sources.²⁸¹ Many LAs during the 1945–64 period had few qualms about frankly stating the financial contribution

²⁷⁸ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 23 Jul 62, 10 Sep 62, 8 Oct 62, 24 Nov 62, 16 Jan 63, 20 Mar 63, 29 May 63, 20 Sep 63

²⁷⁹ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 13 May 59, 27 Aug 59, 21 Sep 59

²⁸⁰ Harwich LA, Minutes, 15 Aug 55, 17 Oct 56

²⁸¹ Blake, R., The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (Fontana, 1972) pp260–1

expected from prospective candidates. Cambridgeshire LA, having asked headquarters for a candidate and “some financial support” in March 1945, selected Lieutenant L. E. Goodman after he had stated how much he could contribute to his election fund. He resigned in 1948, stating that the association “lacks physical and financial effort and tends towards Toryism”.²⁸² Of two candidates selected by Glasgow Hillhead LA during the run-up to the 1945 general election from a list submitted by the SLP, one, a Mr. Jack, made a “frank statement” about the financial contribution he could make to the impoverished association, and resigned his candidacy within weeks of accepting it.²⁸³ Bognor Regis Liberals considered potential candidates’ financial credentials to be the most important aspect of the selection process in 1949.²⁸⁴ Nor were the demands sometimes placed on PPCs necessarily kept secret. The Brentford and Chiswick Times reported in January 1950 that the local LA was seeking a parliamentary candidate who could pay the bulk of his election expenses.²⁸⁵ Constituency associations were not the only Liberal bodies interested in the financial status of parliamentary candidates. Lady Glen-Coats, an SLP officer, reported on A. J. F. Macdonald’s adoption at Roxburgh and Selkirk in 1944 that “she should have stopped [his] adoption as he retracted his financial offer, was defeatist and took a bad tone with the constituency officers”.²⁸⁶ Comments on candidates’ financial affairs were less common after 1950 but even in the late 1950s, the suggestion that parliamentary candidates pay their own costs was current. Lewisham North LA’s Executive Committee narrowly rejected a motion in 1958 to adopt a Mr. Carpenter as PPC

²⁸² Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 17 Mar 45, 1 May 48

²⁸³ Glasgow Hillhead LA, Minutes, 2 Mar 45, 5 May 45, 30 May 45

²⁸⁴ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 10 Oct 49

²⁸⁵ Brentford and Chiswick Times, 27 Jan 50

²⁸⁶ Esslemont Papers, Report on A. J. F. MacDonald, Jul 44 (MS3037/1/42/1-b)

on the condition that he would guarantee his deposit.²⁸⁷ The constituency reports compiled during the operation of the Special Aid Scheme found numerous examples of PPCs making substantial regular contributions to LA funds.²⁸⁸

BY-ELECTIONS

The decisions regarding whether or not to contest a seat and which candidate to select were required of the Liberal Party and its local associations in advance of by-elections as much as before general elections. By-elections differed from general election campaigns in two important respects, however. Firstly, decisions concerning by-election contests had to be taken within a shorter time frame than those about general election contests; and secondly, the national political focus on by-election contests was much more considerable than that on individual constituency contests in a general election. These two factors combined to encourage the tendency for the Liberal headquarters and federations to involve themselves in decisions regarding by-election contests, both about whether or not a Liberal candidate should stand and about who that candidate should be. Given the reluctance of LAs to accept external interference in these decisions, by-elections might be expected to generate further conflict between the central and local units of the Liberal Party. On the whole, however, LAs respected the views, and legitimate interests, of the national party when it came to by-elections.

²⁸⁷ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 7 Jan 58

²⁸⁸ LPO Papers, report by E. Wheeler on Colne Valley LA (including financial contribution to LA by Richard Wainwright) and letter from I. Campbell to J. Thorpe, 23 Nov 64 (including financial contribution by James Collier to Tiverton LA) (reference 17/3/95, 136–7). And see p66 for reference to Gerald Whitmarsh

The national party gave little formal guidance to Liberal associations about what to do in the event of a by-election; editions of Fighting for Liberalism and Effective Organising neglected to mention the issue. Nevertheless, and as Rasmussen reported, a mechanism existed to decide which by-elections to fight, involving a tripartite meeting of LPO, federation and constituency officials. In 1949, the preparedness of an association for a contest and the degree of financial and other assistance required from headquarters were defined as the relevant factors for the tripartite meeting to consider before sanctioning the adoption of a Liberal candidate. Again, however, the final decision on whether or not to contest and whom to adopt was recognised as lying with associations and Rasmussen noted several examples of rank-and-file enthusiasm for by-election fights which the national party, at least initially, blunted.²⁸⁹

Rasmussen states that the tripartite mechanism was first outlined by the LPO Executive Committee in 1947.²⁹⁰ The first instance of its use in London, however, was in 1955, to determine whether to fight the Walthamstow West by-election. Previous decisions, concerning Ilford North and Shoreditch and Finsbury in 1954, appear to have been made by the LLP and the local association concerned (although in the latter case no LA existed) without headquarters' involvement; and in 1953 there appears to have been no coordination between the LLP and LPO over their attitudes to the Holborn and St. Pancras South by-

²⁸⁹ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp99–102. It is unclear what arrangements existed for the determination of by-election strategy prior to 1949, even on paper. In 1946, however, the Eastern Committee of the Scottish Liberal Federation declared that, in the event of a by-election in Caithness and Sutherland, all arrangements would be made from London, indicating the importance attached to such contests, particularly those which the Liberals could win, by the Party's headquarters — Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Committee, Minutes, 7 Mar 46. In contrast, the decision whether or not to contest the Glasgow Camlachie by-election in 1948 was left entirely to the local Liberals — SLP Executive Committee, Minutes, 31 Oct 47

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

election.²⁹¹ The Walthamstow West by-election illustrated the influence of headquarters on by-election contests at this time. The LA was informed that headquarters would concentrate its resources on the Hereford by-election, for which polling was to occur two weeks in advance of the Walthamstow contest. Headquarters was keen for the seat to be fought, however, and, despite having earlier declared that no parliamentary candidates were available for the seat,²⁹² offered two prospective candidates. The LA's choice of Oliver Smedley was undoubtedly influenced by his ability to contribute to his expenses.²⁹³

There was little evidence of the tripartite mechanism in operation at several other by-elections during this period. Leicester South East LA approached the East Midlands Federation for a candidate when a by-election was called in 1957; Edgar Hardy, the Party's former chief agent, promised to find a candidate, but none was forthcoming and there was no further discussion of the election by the association's Executive Committee and a formal decision not to contest was never taken.²⁹⁴ Southport LA's decision to contest the 1952 by-election followed the intervention of the former Liberal Chief Whip, Frank Byers, to persuade David Bently, candidate at the 1951 general election, to stand again. The North West Federation did not appear to be involved with this decision.²⁹⁵ The decision of Harwich LA not to contest the 1954 by-election also appears to have by-passed the Federation, being made after consultation with Edgar Hardy and with the branch

²⁹¹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 16 Oct 53, 4 Jan 54, 26 Aug 54, 12 Dec 55

²⁹² See p81

²⁹³ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 19 Oct 55, 7 Dec 55, 2 Jan 56, 3 Jan 56, 7 Mar 56, 15 Mar 56; and see pp41–2

²⁹⁴ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 26 Jun 57, 19 Aug 57

²⁹⁵ Southport LA, Minutes, 4 Jan 52, 16 Jan 52, 19 Jan 52, 22 Jan 52

association in Harwich town.²⁹⁶ Lewisham North LA informed the London Liberal Party in December 1956 that it would decide for itself whether or not to contest the forthcoming by-election there; pressure from the Chief Whip, Donald Wade, not to fight decided the issue, however.²⁹⁷ The decision to contest the 1961 Warrington by-election was taken by the local LA and the North West Federation, without reference to the national party.²⁹⁸

After the success of Mark Bonham Carter at Torrington in 1958, and a string of impressive Liberal results in other by-elections, Liberal federations and associations received indications from headquarters that more Liberal by-election candidates should be found, although “compelling political reasons” were required if the LPO was to finance contests in constituencies in which the Party was weak.²⁹⁹ This change was endorsed by the federations, in particular, but was not unanimously supported.³⁰⁰ Southend West LA called on the LPO to prevent “irresponsible” by-election contests in places where Liberal candidates could not possibly succeed.³⁰¹ Tripartite meetings no longer focused on the issue of whether a by-election should be fought but on how a good result could be obtained. The meeting to discuss the Deptford by-election in 1963 led to the existing PPC standing down and to the LPO and LLP both channelling vital organisational aid into the constituency.³⁰²

²⁹⁶ Harwich LA, Minutes, 15 Jan 54

²⁹⁷ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 5 Dec 56, 10 Jan 57

²⁹⁸ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 31 Jan 61

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 Feb 61

³⁰⁰ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 31 Mar 60, 21 Jul 60, 16 Oct 60

³⁰¹ Southend West LA, Minutes, 15 May 64. On 14 May, Liberal candidates polled badly in Winchester, Devizes and Bury St. Edmunds

³⁰² London Liberal Party, Minutes, 23 May 63, 20 Jun 63. Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 7 Jan 63

Although Rasmussen recognised that LAs might wish to oppose the decision reached at a tripartite meeting not to contest a by-election, this was not the only source of conflict. Donald Wade, the Liberal Chief Whip, opposed the prospect of a Liberal candidate at the Hornsey by-election in 1957. The LA, LLP and even the LPO expressed their support for a candidate, however, and the LLP drew up plans for a contest. The Liberals did not contest the seat because the LA's financial and organisational requirements could not be met quickly.³⁰³ The Chester by-election in 1956 was contested by a Liberal against the wishes of the LA, a factor which the North West Federation considered contributed to the relatively poor result.³⁰⁴

When a Liberal association decided, against the advice of headquarters, to fight a by-election, the national party could refuse to back the association with financial and organisational assistance. Rasmussen stated that "only a local association with adequate funds could afford to defy the recommendation of the tripartite meeting".³⁰⁵ Things were rarely this simple, however. The LPO, the North West Federation and Liverpool Liberal Federation all argued against a Liberal fighting the Edge Hill by-election in 1947, but the seat was fought as a result of the intervention of Sir Herbert Young, who presumably paid for the contest in the absence of a viable divisional LA.³⁰⁶ Both the LLP and LPO opposed a contest at Holborn and St. Pancras South in 1953. The Liberal candidate in 1950 had polled just 2,411 votes (6.08 per cent) and there was some doubt about whether the LA was correctly constituted. Despite this, the LLP agreed to back the candidature of I. J. Hyam

³⁰³ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 21 Feb 57, 21 Mar 57

³⁰⁴ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 16 Nov 56. The Liberal share of the poll was 12.1 per cent

³⁰⁵ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p100

³⁰⁶ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 19 Sep 47. The Liberal share of the poll was 4.4 per cent

if the association decided to fight. Thus, a weak LA was able to defy the wishes of the LPO and LLP and fight the by-election.³⁰⁷ Similarly, Colonel Lort-Phillips contested Ebbw Vale in 1960 against the wishes of the LPO and the Monmouthshire Liberal Federation and despite there not being a Liberal association in the constituency. The LPO wished to use “every means possible” to discourage him from standing but Donald Wade decided that it would be better for the Party to accept Lort-Phillips’ candidature than to disown him, although there was no question of his receiving financial assistance.³⁰⁸ The LPO was also opposed to the Liberals contesting the Birmingham Small Heath by-election in 1961 because a poor result was expected, but the prospect of an independent Liberal candidate emerging if the seat was not fought led to an official Liberal standing and securing the second worst Liberal share of the poll in a by-election for seven years.³⁰⁹

Rasmussen’s assertion held good in Faversham, in 1964, however. The LA was only recently formed when a by-election was called for 4 June, just months before a general election was due. Following a string of poor by-election results, headquarters wished to avoid a by-election contest in which a bad result would attract more adverse publicity, although no attempts had been made to dissuade contests in Devizes, Bury St Edmunds and Winchester, which were fought against the advice of the LPO’s General Election Committee.³¹⁰ Both headquarters and the Home Counties federation emphasised that

³⁰⁷ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 16 Oct 53, 5 Nov 53, 19 Nov 53. Hyam polled 2.3 per cent of the vote on 19 November 1953

³⁰⁸ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 25 Jul 60, 22 Aug 60, 17 Oct 60, 8 Feb 61. Lort-Phillips was the first Liberal to contest Ebbw Vale since 1929

³⁰⁹ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 29 Nov 60

³¹⁰ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 25 Apr 64. The General Election Committee was the successor of the Organising Committee

resources would not be forthcoming to assist the LA if it decided to contest the seat. Despite this, PPC Paul Hayden's protestation that it was a duty of all Liberals to contest every election led to the LA voting in favour of the contest. Further pressure was exerted on the LA until the vote was overturned, but Hayden led a delegation to headquarters demanding, without result, aid for the LA in the run-up to the general election.³¹¹

Candidate selection tended to involve the same factors for by-election contests as for general elections, but with some evidence of increased involvement of the federations in the decision-making process, as at Deptford in 1963, above. The London Liberal Party, for example, sought a candidate for the 1945 Tottenham North by-election who could pay the bulk of his expenses.³¹² The LPO Standing Committee resolved that "every step must be taken to prevent the re-adoption" of the 1959 candidate for Mid-Bedfordshire, W. G. Matthews, before the seat was fought in a by-election in 1960, although its efforts proved unsuccessful.³¹³ Headquarters also tended to place its favoured candidates in promising by-election contests, particularly as Liberal support picked up, from the mid-1950s onwards. Thus, Richard Moore was recommended to Cambridgeshire LA in 1961 and Frank Byers, Mark Bonham Carter, Christopher Layton and John Bannerman all stood in by-elections from 1958 onwards.³¹⁴ This influence also explains the preponderance of media personalities who contested by-elections as Liberals during this period — including

³¹¹ Faversham LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 64, 17 Apr 64, 11 May 64, 15 May 64, 5 Jun 64

³¹² London Liberal Party, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 29 Oct 45. No candidate was found

³¹³ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 28 Mar 60

³¹⁴ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 14 Jan 61

Ludovic Kennedy, Robert Glenton, the motoring correspondent of the Daily Express, and Richard Afton, whose wife was a television game show hostess.

SPECIAL AID SCHEME

It was shown earlier that, for most of the 1945–64 period, the LPO was able to contribute something towards the election expenses incurred by many parliamentary candidates, but contributed little, if anything, to the running costs of the LAs. Consequently, the LPO's influence over decisions made by LAs — particularly those involving parliamentary candidate selection — was limited by its inability to offer financial incentives to them to act in accordance with the national party's wishes.

The Special Aid, or Direct Aid, Scheme was established by Jeremy Thorpe in early 1962 to overcome this weakness.³¹⁵ Thorpe had been elected to Parliament following a long campaign to build up the Liberal organisation in North Devon, aided by his talented agent, Lilian Prowse. He intended to apply the same organisational principles which had worked in his own seat to other constituencies which the Liberals could win, offering regular grants to those LAs which complied with the conditions he laid down. The targets of the Scheme included most of the constituencies with Liberal MPs, including Orpington, Huddersfield West and Bolton West; seats in which the Liberals had recorded good general election polls in the past, including Inverness, Merioneth, Carmarthen, Tavistock, Cornwall North, Torrington, Aberdeenshire West, Dorset North and Finchley; and seats where Liberal candidates had done well at by-elections, such as Chippenham, Tiverton, Rochdale, Colne

³¹⁵ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 6 Feb 62; it was not the first such scheme — see p47

Valley, Derbyshire West, Paisley, Oswestry, Worcester, Denbigh, High Peak and Ludlow. North Mearns and Angus was targeted because of the impending retirement of the Liberal and Conservative MP and his replacement by a Conservative candidate. The decision to consider a seat for inclusion in the Scheme was made by Thorpe, primarily on the basis of recent election results.³¹⁶ Fifteen seats were included in the scheme to begin with, and 25 LAs had received assistance by the autumn of 1963.³¹⁷

Although few minutes or papers of the Special Aid Committee appear to have survived, it included Thorpe, the Party's Chief Whip and Chief Agent, the Secretary of the LPO and, as an ally of Thorpe, Dominic le Foe. The Scheme was under Thorpe's control and operated free from the influence of Jo Grimond or of the party activists, represented by the Party Council and Executive. It worked by assessing the condition of the LAs in constituencies chosen by Thorpe to be targeted, either by personal visits by Thorpe, Chief Agent Edward Wheeler, le Foe and others, or by submissions of questionnaires by the LAs. These assessments concentrated on a variety of factors — the quality of the LA's officers and PPC; the financial condition of the association; whether or not ward and branch organisations existed and contributed to the income of the LA; the quality of records kept by the association; the number of active canvassers; the existence and effectiveness of full-time organisational assistance; whether or not the LA had a permanent headquarters; and whether or not local government elections were contested by Liberal candidates — and determined Wheeler's recommendations to Thorpe about the desirability of granting funds to the LA, the level of grant offered, and the conditions attached.

³¹⁶ LPO Papers, Memorandum from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe, F. Byers, D. le Foe and P. Kemmis, undated, and letter from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe, undated (reference 17/3/113, 173–6)

³¹⁷ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 15 Oct 62, 30 Sep 63

The conditions communicated to LAs concerning their eligibility for grants under the Scheme were usually concerned with organisational factors. In 1963, having dealt with opposition from the SLP leadership to interference by a London-based committee in the affairs of Scottish LAs,³¹⁸ Thorpe visited Inverness LA to explain what the association was required to do in order to receive a regular income from the Scheme. The LA was asked to commit itself to achieving an income of £2,000 during the 1963–64 financial year; to have 3,000 fully paid-up members by April 1964; to appoint a full-time agent and two part-time sub-agents; and to organise a publicity campaign, in return for £500 from the Scheme, half to be paid immediately and the balance after three months, dependent on progress made. Further contributions would be based on an assessment of progress, in September 1963.³¹⁹ Grants to other LAs were also linked to organisational improvements; Tavistock LA received £300 in December 1964 towards the employment of a full-time agent; Chippenham LA was offered a visiting organiser rather than a cash grant in December 1962; and Darwen LA was offered support for a “commando raid” by Liberal students in February 1965.³²⁰ Requests for money for other purposes were not certain of a favourable response.³²¹

Although organisational factors were clearly important, they were far from the only variables of concern to Thorpe and his colleagues. Wheeler’s assessments were littered

³¹⁸ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 15 Oct 62

³¹⁹ Inverness LA, Minutes, 2 Apr 63

³²⁰ LPO Papers, letter from J. Thorpe to O. Griffiths-Jones, 22 Mar 65, reports by E. Wheeler on Chippenham LA, 7 Dec 62, and by E. Wheeler on Darwen LA, 24 Feb 65 (reference 17/3/100, 204–7, 242–5)

³²¹ For example, *Ibid.*, letter from J. Thorpe to A. Lacey, 23 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/101) for Tavistock LA’s request for money to help pay off an overdraft

with caustic criticisms of the officers, candidates and even MPs of the Liberal associations he visited. Thus, the Montgomeryshire LA's officers were "completely Welsh and seem to lack application". Emlyn Hooson, the Liberal MP, was a "disappointment" who had "not lived up to the hopes people had of him".³²² Tiverton LA's officers were "not up to the job".³²³ Dorset North LA was "living in cloud-cuckoo-land as far as organisation is concerned" and its general election agent had "lost control" of the campaign.³²⁴ Dennis Wrigley, the Liberal PPC for High Peak, was "lacking a certain stability", his main faults being "his intensity and a capacity for deceiving himself into erroneous beliefs".³²⁵ Richard Wainwright and Edward Dunford, Liberal candidate and agent at Colne Valley, were criticised for their "complacency and self-satisfaction" but Wheeler's strongest criticism during this period was reserved for Huddersfield's Liberals.³²⁶ They were characterised as parochial, defeatist and too friendly with local Conservatives. Huddersfield West MP Donald Wade didn't "know his constituency well" and, Wheeler proposed, should be replaced. His view was that "in one respect the Huddersfield situation is similar to that pertaining in Montgomeryshire before the by-election, namely that while Clement Davies would probably have lost Montgomeryshire and Hooson won it, Donald Wade will almost certainly lose it while someone else might hold it".³²⁷

³²² Ibid., report on Montgomeryshire LA by E. Wheeler, 19 Jan 65 (reference 17/3/8)

³²³ Ibid., letter from I. Campbell to J. Thorpe, 23 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/136-7)

³²⁴ Ibid., report on Dorset North LA by E. Wheeler, 10 Feb 65 (reference 17/3/220-2)

³²⁵ Ibid., report on High Peak LA by E. Wheeler, 12 Mar 64 (reference 17/3/280-1)

³²⁶ Ibid., report on Colne Valley LA by E. Wheeler, 14 May 64 (reference 17/3/305)

³²⁷ Ibid., report on Huddersfield West LA by E. Wheeler, 13-14 May 64 (reference 17/3/303-4)

Comments such as these fuelled pressure on LAs to change their staff and parliamentary candidates, in return for continued funding. Merionethshire LA was asked in 1965 to replace R. O. Jones (described by Wheeler as “very weak” and, earlier, as a “typically ineffectual Welshman”) and adopt Maurice Rees as PPC instead, if they wished to continue receiving Special Aid money.³²⁸ Wheeler opposed the granting of further funds to Finchley LA until they “submit themselves to ‘the treatment’” and also indicated his dislike of John Pardoe, who had “spent too much time courting the Jewish vote”.³²⁹ In this way, Thorpe could promote the candidatures of friends and allies. In 1964, Thorpe offered Dr. Glyn Court the Liberal candidature in a south west seat of his choosing and Court replied to declare his interest in Torrington, a seat in receipt of Special Aid funds and whose officers came in for particular criticism from Wheeler in February 1965.³³⁰ Also in 1964, Thorpe urged North Cornwall LA to deselect Meddon Bruton as PPC; Thorpe sent the LA’s officers a list of prospective candidates including Wheeler and le Foe and warned them against selecting Rochdale LA’s agent, Howard Hill, whom he described as a “disaster”.³³¹

The sources of the money dispensed by the Special Aid Committee is a matter for some speculation. The LPO provided only a fraction of the funds distributed by the Committee. In October 1962, Thorpe told the LPO Organising Committee that the Scheme would spend £15,000 at a cost to the Party of no more than £2,500, inclusive of expenses; in

³²⁸ Ibid., reports on Merionethshire LA by E. Wheeler, 2-3 Jun 64, 20 Jan 65 (reference 17/3/27, 41-2)

³²⁹ Ibid., memorandum from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe and others, undated (reference 17/3/173-6); see G. Alderman, London Jewry and London Politics (Routledge, 1989) pp108-9 on the relationship between Finchley LA and the local Jewish community

³³⁰ Ibid., letter from Dr. G. Court to J. Thorpe, 30 Nov 64, and report on Torrington LA by E. Wheeler, 4 Feb 65 (reference 17/3/117, 156)

³³¹ Ibid., letters from R. Bennett to J. Thorpe, 27 Oct 64, J. Thorpe to E. J. Hoskin 3 Nov 64, Ken ? to J. Thorpe 8 Nov 64, J. Thorpe to E. J. Hoskin 16 Nov 64, E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe 24 Nov 64 and J. Thorpe to R. Bennett 30 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/114-5 and two letters with no reference)

September 1963 he reported that the LPO had contributed only £1,000 to the Scheme's funds.³³² A major source of Special Aid money was the Rowntree Trust. After the 1964 election, Richard Wainwright reported to Thorpe that the Trust was pleased with the election results achieved in seats supported by the Special Aid Scheme and that it might contribute further to the Scheme, as long as the money was received by Thorpe, not the LPO, as the Trust did not regard the LPO as geared up to the job of targeting winnable seats effectively. The Trust tried to influence the choice of constituencies targeted by the Scheme. Wainwright advised Thorpe in November 1964 how to get further money from the Trust — "I suggest that the risk of an early election is a good card. I do not think they will be much impressed if their money is sought just for the extremities of Britain, plus two or three ruined monuments of former Liberal strength. What about Derbyshire West, assuming that Ronald Gardener-Thorpe can be replaced; High Peak, and non-financial help to Scarborough?".³³³ In fact, High Peak and Derbyshire West were already in receipt of finance and were dropped in 1965 and Scarborough was never considered, but Cheadle was added to the Scheme and some interest was shown in Darwen and Eastbourne.³³⁴ Wainwright, himself in receipt of Special Aid funds, was a useful ally for Thorpe on the Rowntree Trust and he organised an interim payment to the Scheme before payments were again approved by the Trustees late in 1964, as well as advising on tactics for convincing the Trustees of the importance of their contribution.³³⁵

³³² LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 15 Oct 62, 30 Sep 63

³³³ LPO Papers, letters from R. Wainwright to J. Thorpe, 28 Oct 64, 12 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/103, 105)

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, memorandum from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe and others, undated and see also reports on Darwen LA by E. Wheeler, 24 Feb 65, and on Eastbourne LA, 26 Mar 65 (reference 17/3/173-6, 252-5, 263-5)

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, letter from R. Wainwright to J. Thorpe, 19 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/100-1)

Another source of funds was rich benefactors, sympathetic to liberalism. Thus, Jeremy Thorpe requested that Dorset North LA desist from approaching a number of local benefactors for funds after the 1964 general election because they were to be targeted instead by the Special Aid Committee.³³⁶ A few months later Wheeler advised Thorpe to contact Stephen Terrell about recruiting two Eastbourne millionaires, in order to siphon some of their spare cash into the scheme.³³⁷ This was by no means the only use made by Liberal Party politicians of substantial private resources; Timothy Beaumont informed Thorpe in February 1965 of his private backing of John Pardoe, over and above any grants made to him by the LPO or as Special Aid.³³⁸ That the funding of the Special Aid Scheme was unorthodox is obvious from the experience of LAs receiving the assistance. Inverness LA, which was exceptionally successful at meeting the organisational targets set for it by Thorpe and his colleagues, regularly complained of payments delayed by months, and correspondence on the subject being left unanswered.³³⁹

The LPO did express unease about the operation of the Scheme, particularly in relation to the funds raised and distributed in the name of the Liberal Party. The Organising Committee insisted from the outset that Thorpe should not approach existing donors to the Party for money, fearing that funds intended for the Party would be given to the Scheme rather than the LPO, and that the Party's Treasurers should monitor the Scheme's

³³⁶ Ibid., letters from J. Thorpe to H. Greenleaves, 30 Nov 64 and R. Lamb to J. Thorpe, 2 Dec 64 (reference 17/3/238-9)

³³⁷ Ibid., letter from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe, 30 Mar 65 (reference 17/3/259)

³³⁸ Ibid., letter from T. Beaumont to J. Thorpe, 16 Feb 65 (reference 17/3/126)

³³⁹ Inverness LA, Minutes, 10 Jan 64, 5 Jun 64

accounting procedures.³⁴⁰ During the Party's financial crisis in 1963 the Organising Committee decided that the Special Aid Scheme's accounts should be externally audited.³⁴¹ Thorpe always maintained that the Scheme had to be kept secret principally because, if the recipients of aid were widely known, then the clamour from other LAs for substantial sums of LPO cash would be deafening.³⁴² The LPO Executive Committee only received one report on the Scheme before the 1964 election, in October 1963. This was the first many senior Liberals had heard of Special Aid and there was strong criticism that the Scheme had been set up without the authority of, or after consultation with, the Executive Committee.³⁴³ The Organising Committee decided in December 1964 that the Scheme should come under closer LPO control, with all funds paid into a LPO bank account for example, although Thorpe retained discretion over the nature and timing of disbursements to LAs.³⁴⁴

The key questions with regard to Special Aid are did it work; did it have a positive impact on the Liberal poll in the targeted seats or, more significantly, on the Liberals' parliamentary representation? The answers are mixed. There were ten LAs to which Special Aid appears to have been offered as a result of promising by-election results during the 1959 Parliament.³⁴⁵ In seven of these seats, the Liberal vote declined between the by-

³⁴⁰ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 6 Feb 62, 19 Feb 62

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17 Apr 63

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 6 Feb 62, 3 Dec 64, 10 Dec 64; see also LPO Papers, report on Dorset North LA by E. Wheeler, 10 Feb 65, and the request for money from Tiverton LA, letter from J. Thorpe to A. Lacy, 23 Nov 64 (reference 17/3/101, 220–2)

³⁴³ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 25 Oct 63

³⁴⁴ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 3 Dec 64

³⁴⁵ Derbyshire West, Worcester, Ludlow, Oswestry, High Peak, Paisley, Colne Valley, Tiverton, Chippenham and Orpington

elections and the 1964 election; and declined still further between the elections of 1964 and 1966. Only in the remaining three seats could Special Aid be said to have assisted the Liberals; possibly helping Eric Lubbock retain Orpington in 1964 and 1966; contributing towards Richard Wainwright's victory in Colne Valley in 1966; and aiding Christopher Layton's efforts in Chippenham, which he narrowly missed winning in 1966. Four LAs were offered Special Aid on account of contributing to the election of Liberal MPs. In the cases of Cardiganshire and Montgomeryshire, Wheeler concluded after the 1964 general election that they "did not react to aid"; Special Aid did not prevent the Liberals losing Huddersfield West and Bolton West in 1964.³⁴⁶ There were ten seats in which the Liberals recorded polls of between 22 per cent and 43 per cent in 1959 and which were granted Special Aid on account of the possibility of a further advance at the next general election.³⁴⁷ Special Aid was a factor in the election of Liberal MPs for Inverness in 1964 and for Cornwall North in 1966; there were also improvements in the Liberal vote in Finchley, Dorset North and Tavistock; but in the other five seats Special Aid seems to have had little impact — for example, the Liberal vote in Rochdale halved between 1959 and 1966. Finally, two seats which were not contested by the Liberals in 1959 or in a subsequent by-election were assisted before the 1964 general election. In Aberdeenshire West, James Davidson re-formed the LA and, strongly backed by the leadership of the SLP, undertook a vigorous campaign to win the seat.³⁴⁸ Special Aid may have played a part in his victory in 1966. The other seat was Angus North and Mearns where Special Aid was

³⁴⁶ LPO Papers, memorandum from E. Wheeler to J. Thorpe and others, late 1964 (reference 17/3/173–6)

³⁴⁷ Nine were regarded as constituencies with a degree of "Liberal tradition" — Denbigh, Rochdale, Merionethshire, Carmarthen, Tavistock, Cornwall North, Torrington, Dorset North and Inverness; in the tenth, Finchley, the Liberals had been particularly successful in local government elections

³⁴⁸ Interview, James Davidson

used to back a member of the SLP Executive Committee who claimed second place in 1964 with 34.0 per cent of the vote.

Five LAs were in receipt of Special Aid for the first time after the 1964 election; in each case, the Liberal candidate polled more votes in 1966 than in 1964, despite the national trend to the contrary. In three of the five — Bodmin, Cheadle and Ross and Cromarty — Liberal MPs were elected in 1966; the Liberals won Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles in a by-election in 1965 and held the seat in 1966; and in Caithness and Sutherland, George Mackie was defeated in 1966 despite increasing his poll. It is impossible to evaluate exactly the impact of Special Aid on the Liberal associations which received it and on the electoral performance of the Liberal Party; it is similarly impossible to estimate what would have happened in Inverness and other constituencies if aid had not been forthcoming to boost the Liberal candidatures in the run-up to the 1964 and 1966 general elections. Nevertheless, the scheme was popular both with those who organised it and those who benefited from it and targeting of headquarters' assistance to particular seats became an established part of Liberal electoral strategy after 1964.

Conclusion

The question posed at the beginning of this survey was, considering finance and the selection of parliamentary candidates, whether or not the Liberal Party's constituency associations had "little positive effect" on the national party, as Rasmussen claimed. The evidence presented above suggests that the interrelationships between the various aspects of the national party, the area federations and the constituency associations had a

considerable and significant impact on the Liberal Party as a whole. Without considering and understanding Liberal associations, the Liberal Party as a whole cannot properly be analysed.

The national institutions of the Liberal Party after 1945 were so weak that they threw themselves upon the resources of the local associations by means of the Assembly appeal and, later, the quota mechanism. This gave local associations the ability to withhold their contributions in order to alter particular aspects of the Party's policy or strategy. This was rarely done; where contributions were not paid this almost always reflected local organisational weakness rather than deliberate frustration of the leadership. Nevertheless, the leadership's plans were, at this time, dependent upon finance received from ordinary party members and local benefactors. Rasmussen himself notes the occasion in 1957 when the LPO announced that, without further backing from constituency associations, it would be forced to close down within six weeks.³⁴⁹ Financial dependence upon the local associations was a major check, and in some cases influence, upon the activities of the national party.

In terms of parliamentary candidate selection, the role of constituency associations was central. Although the national party took a particular interest in certain seats and certain candidates, and in by-election contests, parliamentary candidate selection throughout most of the country was entirely dependent upon the local associations. Even when requested, help from the LCA with regard to selection was regularly refused. The national party had little control over the quality of Liberal candidates standing at elections; nor could it

³⁴⁹ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p24

prevent seats being fought. Local associations did pay attention to the leadership's pronouncements on the advisability of a broad or narrow electoral front and selection decisions throughout the 1950s tended to follow such indications. The leadership's influence over the small number of Liberal candidates standing in 1951 and 1955 should not be exaggerated, however, because local financial factors were usually crucial. The development of the Special Aid Scheme permitted Jeremy Thorpe to exercise considerable influence over candidate selection and organisational reforms in certain constituencies, which paved the way for the targeting of resources to key constituencies by the LPO in future years.

III. Liberal District Organisations

Introduction

Just as the relationship between constituency LAs and the LPO influenced key matters such as the Liberal Party's financial state and the selection of parliamentary candidates, so did the relationship between constituency LAs and sub-units of Liberal organisation, such as ward LAs, affect the ways in which constituency LAs operated. In this Chapter it will be shown that sub-units of Liberal organisation varied considerably in their size, effectiveness, and the roles they undertook. It will also be shown how the existence of sub-units of constituency LAs contributed to the survival and revival of the Liberal Party. Students of the Party have typically used the number of LAs affiliated to the LPO as a measure of the strength of the Party,³⁵⁰ but this indicator sometimes understated the Party's strength and geographical coverage because of the existence of unaffiliated Liberal organisations in some places. Sub-units of Liberal organisation, for example, were not allowed to affiliate to the LPO, but in some parts of the country they existed independently of constituency LAs. This Chapter will show how the persistence of sub-units of Liberal organisation helped the Party to survive in some areas and facilitated revival in later years.

Definitions

Not all Liberal associations included sub-units of Liberal organisation. Some LAs were too weak for effective sub-units to be formed and sometimes it was decided not to form sub-

³⁵⁰ See p11

units in order to conserve the strength of the constituency LA.³⁵¹ In some places the rationale in favour of branch LAs was questioned. It was noted in 1945, for instance, that there was no provision in the constitution of Leeds North constituency LA for ward organisations, although the North Ward LA had been founded in 1930.³⁵² Where Liberal sub-units of organisation were established they tended to take one of two forms. Liberal ward organisations were usually set up in predominantly urban constituencies; branch organisations, covering a small town or village, tended to be formed in predominantly rural constituencies. In some constituencies, both ward and branch LAs were set up. Newbury constituency LA, for example, included a branch LA covering the town of Newbury and ward LAs within the town.³⁵³ Sub-units of district LAs often struggled to survive, forming, failing, and reforming as leading members came and went.³⁵⁴ Occasionally branch LAs were established in urban or suburban areas to cover several wards,³⁵⁵ or in rural areas to cover several villages.³⁵⁶ Other forms of Liberal organisational sub-units were unusual. Altrincham LA included polling district LAs before 1945, but this term was used for the branch LAs formed in Altrincham and Sale LA in 1945 after the constituency was

³⁵¹ See for instance Peckham LA, Minutes, 1 Jun 50, 20 Jun 50 and Interview, Martin Kyrle

³⁵² Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 14 Aug 45

³⁵³ Newbury LA, Minutes, 6 Mar 62, 4 Apr 62; and for similar arrangements see Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 19 Dec 49, 7 Jul 58, 5 Jan 62, 16 Apr 62, 19 Jun 62, 30 Aug 62, 28 Sep 62; Enfield West LA, Minutes, 28 Nov 49, 15 May 50 for ward LAs which were part of Potters Bar LA; Inverness LA, Minutes, 10 Feb 55, 4 Mar 55, 1 Apr 55

³⁵⁴ See experience of Blindley Heath LA, part of Godstone LA, which was itself a branch of Reigate LA, Godstone LA, Minutes, 21 Feb 61, 7 Aug 62; also failure to establish ward organisations in Sittingbourne, Faversham LA, Minutes, 23 Jul 63

³⁵⁵ Chester Chronicle, 28 Jan 61, on structure of Bebington LA; see also merger of West and South West Ward LAs in Enfield West LA to form North Enfield and District LA, Enfield West LA, Minutes, 28 Apr 53; and examples in Hampstead LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 47, 14 Jun 50, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 15 Dec 47, 17 Jun 53, Southport LA, Minutes, 8 Feb 45, 19 Mar 45, 6 Sep 51, Minutes of joint Hoe Street and Wood Street wards LA (Walthamstow), 1955–7; for various district LAs being divided to form new organisations see Surrey East LA, Minutes, 15 Mar 60 and Organisation Committee, Minutes, 4 Jan 61

³⁵⁶ Harborough LA, Minutes, 11 Feb 48 and Interview, Robin Otter, re. Breedon Hill LA in Worcestershire

reorganised.³⁵⁷ Leeds North Ward LA formed polling district organisations after the 1945 local elections, but only for the purposes of distributing literature. They were in existence for only a few months, although two were re-formed in 1949.³⁵⁸ “Street, block and district” Liberal organisations were proposed in Hampstead in 1951 but not established,³⁵⁹ Liberal “group leaders” in four streets in the Lee South ward of Lewisham North LA were reported in 1960,³⁶⁰ “area stewards” were proposed in Coulsdon in 1958, and “street captains” in Walthamstow in 1953.³⁶¹ This Chapter will analyse the relationship between Liberal constituency associations and ward and branch, described here as district, organisations, focusing on finance and local government issues.

Constituency and District LAs — Theory

As with the organisation of constituency LAs, the guidance given by the Liberal Party Organisation about the organisation of district LAs and their relationship with constituency LAs changed during the period from 1945 to 1964. In Fighting for Liberalism, published in 1950, it was envisaged that district Liberal committees would be set up in each constituency LA. These bodies were intended to undertake work on behalf of constituency

³⁵⁷ Altrincham LA, General Council, Minutes, 8 May 40, 20 Jun 41, Altrincham and Sale LA, Minutes, 20 Sep 45, 11 Oct 45, 12 Dec 45, 4 Apr 46, 4 Jun 46

³⁵⁸ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 45, 21 Jan 46, 4 Mar 46, 25 Mar 46, 16 May 49, 20 Jun 49, 18 Jul 48, 24 Oct 49; polling district organisations were also suggested in Enfield West LA, Minutes, 13 Feb 50, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 5 Jan 50, Sheffield Heeley LA, Minutes, 29 May 62, and Higham Hill (Walthamstow) LA, Minutes, 9 Oct 61

³⁵⁹ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 1 Mar 51

³⁶⁰ Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 17 Feb 60; street committees were also proposed in Ladywell ward, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 29 Jun 59

³⁶¹ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 19 Aug 58 and see Surrey East LA, Organisation Committee, Minutes, 14 Feb 58, Coulsdon and Purley LA, Minutes, 17 May 63, 15 Apr 64 (proposal to replace quota system with an annual draw), and Higham Hill (Walthamstow) Ward LA, Minutes, Mar 53

LAs, primarily recruitment, canvassing, literature distribution, and the arrangement of meetings, and to elect delegates to the executive committee of the constituency LA. The constituency LA was supposed to keep a close eye on the activities of district committees, particularly because it was recommended that the senior officers of the constituency LA would be members of every district association. It was suggested that the work of the district organisations would be delegated even further, to road stewards, or, in rural areas, to Liberal contacts in each village and hamlet. The financial relationship between constituency and district LAs was not clearly defined in Fighting for Liberalism. District committees were given responsibility for recruiting members and Liberal News subscribers but it was suggested that all of the money thus collected should be passed to the constituency LA treasurer and no provision was made for money to be retained by or remitted to the district LAs. The selection of local election candidates was not seen as a responsibility of district LAs. Instead, it was for the chairman of the constituency LA to “keep on the look-out for possible candidates to stand in the local elections”.³⁶²

In the 1958 publication Effective Organising, constituency LAs continued to be regarded as “the key unit of the organisation” but it was recognised that it was not always possible or desirable for district organisations to be formed and a separate chapter on the formation of such bodies was included.³⁶³ No mention was made of the need for formal organisational structures at a more localised level, such as road stewards. A more important role for district LAs was described in Effective Organising than in its predecessor volume with the statement that “with the formation of a local branch the divisional association has, in effect,

³⁶² Fighting for Liberalism, pp13–19

³⁶³ Effective Organising, 1958, p6

handed the district concerned into the safe keeping of the branch and its officers”.³⁶⁴ It remained important for the chairman of the constituency LA to “keep in touch with all branches ... and see that they are working smoothly” but the recommendation that he or she should be a member of every branch LA executive committee was dropped.³⁶⁵ The recommended financial relationship between constituency and district LAs was made much clearer in 1958. District LAs were to be set quotas, based on the size of the electorate in the areas they covered, which were to be paid to constituency LAs, although a proportion of subscriptions collected centrally could be used to defray quotas. Finally, a clear role for district committees in the selection of local election candidates was described in Effective Organising. The executive committees of district LAs were expected to recommend potential candidates for approval by the executive committee of the constituency LA and the final decision on the adoption of local election candidates was left to general meetings of district LAs.

The edition of Effective Organising published in 1963 did not make any alterations to the proposed duties of district LAs, but an important change to the relationship between district and constituency LAs was suggested. District LAs were described as “the basic units of organisation”, and the publication began with a lengthy description of how they could be formed, while constituency LAs were described merely as “a key unit” of the Liberal Party’s organisation. This represented a subtle change in emphasis in favour of district LAs when compared to the position in 1958 and was a far cry from the position described in

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p21

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p7

1952, when district organisations were regarded simply as tools for implementing the policy of constituency LAs.³⁶⁶

Constituency and District LAs — Practice

The changes in the guidance offered by the Liberal Party Organisation about the role of district LAs in part reflected evolving views about the best means of organising the Party. The recommendation that district LAs should make quota payments to constituency LAs resulted from the attempts to reorganise the LPO's finances in the mid-1950s, for example. In other respects, however, the changing guidance acknowledged that district LAs were a more important aspect of the Party's organisation than was recognised in Fighting for Liberalism. Even by 1963, however, the LPO's advice about how district LAs should be organised, and how they should be related to constituency LAs, did little justice to the diverse range of district LAs in existence and their different interactions with constituency Liberal organisations.

NUMBER

Very few constituency LAs were ever able to ensure that district LAs were established in every part of the division. Many urban and suburban LAs struggled to maintain their ward organisations throughout the 1945–64 period.³⁶⁷ Ward organisations in the town of

³⁶⁶ Effective Organising, 1963, pp1, 11

³⁶⁷ For instance, Hampstead LA, Minutes, 2 May 46, 7 Mar 47, 20 Mar 51, 25 Apr 51, 11 Feb 52, 5 Mar 53, 29 Jun 53, 17 Sep 53, 24 Sep 56, 11 Mar 57, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 15 Mar 48, 2 Jun 48, 22 Nov 48, 19 Jan 51, 14 Nov 51, 25 Jun 56, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 29 Jun 49, 5 Jan 50, 21 Jun 50, 30 Mar 51, 27 Aug 51, 24 Feb 53, 23 Mar 53, 1 Feb 54, 8 Oct 62, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 18 Mar 52, 2 Aug 53, 16 Jan 58, 13 Sep 61, 4 Nov 63, and Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 9 Aug 48, 13 Dec 48, 28

Banbury, for example, were absent throughout the 1945–64 period, until they began to be re-formed in April 1964.³⁶⁸ Chester's Liberals maintained ward organisations only in those wards which consistently returned Liberal councillors during the 1945–64 period.³⁶⁹ It proved impossible to form branches of Dunfermline LA in Lochgelly, Cowdenbeath and Inverkeithing when the constituency LA was revived in 1949, and the possibility of forming ward LAs in Dunfermline itself was never even discussed.³⁷⁰

In rural seats it was common for district LAs to be established in a few towns and large villages, but it was not unusual for large areas of constituencies to be devoid of even a known Liberal contact.³⁷¹ Torrington LA was one of the better organised constituency LAs during the 1945–64 period, but it could boast only ten district LAs at the time of the 1958 by-election, although a further 21 were created as the activity undertaken there by the Liberal Party increased at that time.³⁷² Harborough LA had only four branches in December 1951, despite having just put forward a candidate at the October 1951 general election,³⁷³ and it was recorded in January 1953 that there were parts of the constituency in which the LA had no contacts.³⁷⁴ The Liberal Party had no organisation or contacts in 27 of 130

Apr 49, 2 Feb 53

³⁶⁸ Banbury Guardian, 20 Apr 64

³⁶⁹ For instance see Chester Chronicle, 21 Jan 61, Chester Observer, 14 Mar 59, and Chester LA, Papers, undated press cutting on the retirement of James Shepley, constituency agent, 1958 (reference CR159/29)

³⁷⁰ Dunfermline LA, Minutes, 13 Jun 49, 12 Sep 49, 10 Oct 49, 7 Nov 49, 27 Mar 50

³⁷¹ For instance Chester Chronicle, 21 Jan 61, on five or six village LAs in the Northwich constituency (although the newspaper reported on 28 Jan 61 that it was hoped to revive LAs in all 28 wards) and four branches of Nantwich LA; Surrey East LA had only one branch LA in 1956, Minutes, 8 Feb 56

³⁷² Winkleigh LA, Minutes, 11 Aug 58

³⁷³ Harborough LA, Minutes, 29 Dec 51 and also 11 Dec 52

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 Jan 53

towns and villages in the Penrith and the Border constituency in 1950, and there had been only fifteen committee meetings and eighteen social events organised by district LAs in the division in the preceding year.³⁷⁵ Two years later the number of towns and villages in the constituency in which the Liberals were devoid of contacts had fallen to 21, but there existed only nine district LAs.³⁷⁶ In May 1957, there were 27 branches of Inverness LA against a target of 72 which it was thought was required to cover the whole constituency.³⁷⁷ By 1964, when Inverness returned a Liberal to Parliament, there were 30 branch LAs in the constituency against a target of 40.³⁷⁸

The development of district LAs in Cambridgeshire during the period from 1945 to 1964 gives a good example of the efforts made to establish Liberal contacts throughout a rural constituency and the difficulties encountered in creating and maintaining formal branch organisations. LAs were active in only three Cambridgeshire villages during the winter of 1946–47 but Liberals from fourteen different villages in the county sat on the constituency LA's Executive Committee, suggesting that the party was not entirely devoid of influence throughout the division.³⁷⁹ In 1953 it was resolved that the LA should seek a contact in every village in the constituency but nothing was done to translate this intention into action and two years later representatives from only nine villages were members of the LA's Executive Committee.³⁸⁰ A new aim was formulated in 1956, to ensure that there were

³⁷⁵ Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 6 May 50

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 8 Mar 52

³⁷⁷ Inverness LA, Minutes, 14 May 57, 27 May 57

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 13 May 64

³⁷⁹ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 15 Feb 47

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 21 Mar 53, 26 Mar 55

three “officers” in each village in the constituency, focusing initially on three of the largest villages, but in 1958 the previous aim of a contact in each village was restated.³⁸¹ One year later the constituency LA decided to write to lapsed members in a bid to form district LAs, but this approach did not bear fruit.³⁸² The formation of a Campaign Sub-committee in April 1960 offered a new mechanism for forming district LAs, but it was reported in November 1960 that Harston LA was only the fifth to be established in the Cambridgeshire division.³⁸³

FORMATION

District LAs were often formed as a result of canvassing,³⁸⁴ the distribution of referendum cards,³⁸⁵ or holding speaker meetings or social events.³⁸⁶ Some constituency LAs formed committees charged with the task of forming and organising new district organisations.³⁸⁷ Parliamentary election campaigns were often a spur to the creation of district LAs. In Cambridgeshire, after the 1945 election, efforts were made to reform district LAs in the villages of Histon and Willingham and to reclaim Soham and Burwell Liberal Clubs for

³⁸¹ Ibid., 9 Jun 56, 22 Feb 58

³⁸² Ibid., 9 May 59, 27 Jun 59

³⁸³ Ibid., 29 Apr 60, 2 Jul 60; Independent Press, 4 Nov 60

³⁸⁴ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 18 Apr 57, 16 Jul 57, 28 Apr 59 and Walsall LA, Annual Report, 1951

³⁸⁵ Stockport LA, Minutes, 18 Jan 48. Referendum cards were delivered to all of the houses in a neighbourhood with the request for Liberals to return them to the LA. They were used to facilitate recruitment and to help found new district and constituency LAs

³⁸⁶ Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 28 May 46; Ashmore Papers, letter from A. K. Powell to B. Ashmore, 9 Nov 62

³⁸⁷ For instance Surrey East LA, Organisation Committee, Minutes, 3 Feb 60; and Southport LA established a committee in 1951 to “prepare the machinery and organise the wards for the next municipal elections and also for a general election”, Minutes, 16 Aug 51

the Party;³⁸⁸ several new village LAs were established during and after the 1950 election in the Harborough constituency;³⁸⁹ and a number of branch LAs were formed in Inverness as a result of the 1954 parliamentary by-election.³⁹⁰ Constituency LAs were active during the Liberal Party's recruitment campaign of the late 1940s in forming district LAs.³⁹¹ University students' "commando raids" were also often geared at forming district LAs.³⁹²

During the period of Liberal revival in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a large number of district LAs was established. District LAs were set up throughout the Brentford and Chiswick constituency by July 1962, only four years after the constituency LA was refounded.³⁹³ In 1959 there was no Liberal organisation of any kind in Enfield, but three years later there were two constituency LAs, thirteen ward LAs with two more in the process of being established, Women's and Young Liberal associations, and ten Liberal councillors.³⁹⁴ There were only four district LAs in the huge Penrith and the Border constituency in 1959, but within four years there were eighteen.³⁹⁵ Such rapid growth was not necessarily sustainable: some of the ward organisations in Brentford and Chiswick

³⁸⁸ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 24 Nov 45, 12 Jan 46

³⁸⁹ Harborough LA, Minutes, 14 Jan 50, 25 Mar 50

³⁹⁰ Inverness LA, Minutes, 10 Feb 55, 4 Mar 55

³⁹¹ For example Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 19 Nov 49

³⁹² Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 14 Apr 56; but the effectiveness of commando raids was criticised by Surrey East LA, Organisation Committee, Minutes, 29 Oct 60 and see LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 11 Jul 60

³⁹³ Brentford and Chiswick Times, 7 Mar 58, 6 Jul 62

³⁹⁴ Enfield Gazette, 30 Nov 62

³⁹⁵ Ashmore Papers, "Penrith and the Border, a Liberal Assessment", undated paper by J. R. Howe; and Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 14 May 60, 16 Jun 62

were forced to merge in 1963.³⁹⁶ Nor, even in areas where the Liberal Party gained strength, was it always possible to establish district LAs on a uniform basis. In Penrith and the Border in 1962 the villages of Skelton, Thomas Close, Ivegill, Southwaite and the Heskets were all described as “unknown territory” from the Liberal point of view.³⁹⁷

The rapid formation of new district LAs was sometimes due to the influence of key individuals who were prepared to canvass and recruit new Liberal Party members and help them form stable LAs. Edward Rushworth, who played a prominent role in the revival of Liberal activity in the Harborough constituency, approached Leicester South East LA in 1957 with a plan to form an LA in Oadby and Knighton.³⁹⁸ The new LA was quickly established and was soon followed by several other new district organisations.³⁹⁹ The members of the Executive Committee of Penrith and the Border LA were several times asked to take responsibility for the creation of district LAs in the constituency, although their effectiveness may be questioned.⁴⁰⁰

AREA PARTIES

The size of some rural constituencies posed challenges to effective political organisation which necessitated the creation of sub-units of constituency LAs to coordinate the work of district LAs. In Inverness it was difficult for representatives of the branches of the

³⁹⁶ Brentford and Chiswick Times, 25 Oct 63

³⁹⁷ Ashmore Papers, letter from A. Powell to B. Ashmore, 4 Dec 62

³⁹⁸ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 18 Mar 57

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 Dec 57, 13 Jan 58, 17 Feb 58, 15 May 58, 14 Jul 58, 8 Sep 58

⁴⁰⁰ Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 24 Nov 51, 8 Mar 52, 19 Jan 57

constituency LA outside of the city itself to attend meetings of the constituency LA's Executive Committee.⁴⁰¹ This generated demands for a small number of district Liberal committees to be formed based on Skye and in towns such as Fort William which could over-see branch LAs and represent their interests on the constituency LA's Executive Committee.⁴⁰² Four area Liberal parties were established in the Torrington constituency in 1958 in order to help people attend meetings in a scattered division.⁴⁰³ The area parties held social events, had membership targets, and were responsible for the formation of branch LAs and for monitoring their activity.⁴⁰⁴ That contact between district and constituency LAs could be limited in rural areas was illustrated by the tour made by officers of Harborough LA to Lutterworth, Hallaton, Wigston Magna, Whetstone and Braunstone in 1951 to find out what the LAs in each village were doing, and by 1958 six Liberal area organisations had been established in the constituency.⁴⁰⁵ G. Westle, an LPO organiser, recommended area LAs to Harwich constituency LA in 1953, and the constituency was divided into two areas, based on the Harwich and Clacton branches, in 1954.⁴⁰⁶

SIZE

Some district LAs became substantial organisations in their own right. Croydon East Ward LA had, in 1953, several hundred members, its own penny-a-week fighting fund for local

⁴⁰¹ Inverness LA, Minutes, 3 Dec 52

⁴⁰² Ibid., 5 Jun 45, 4 Sep 45, 11 Mar 50, 24 Mar 50, 7 Dec 62

⁴⁰³ Torrington LA, Minutes, 6 Jun 58

⁴⁰⁴ Torrington Area Liberal Party, Minutes, 12 Jun 61, 14 Aug 62, 19 Feb 63, 11 Jun 63

⁴⁰⁵ Harborough LA, Minutes, 27 Apr 51, 20 Mar 58

⁴⁰⁶ Harwich LA, Minutes, 8 Oct 53, 25 Nov 54

elections, area wardens for collecting subscriptions, and it operated a waste paper collection scheme.⁴⁰⁷ Knighton and Oadby LA had a membership of 550 in 1962, which amounted to one-half of the total membership of Leicester South East LA, and a number of other district LAs had over 100 members during the 1945–64 period.⁴⁰⁸ In comparison, Turner’s study of three London constituencies in the early 1960s found that the membership of Labour ward parties varied from 28 to 1,000 and Blondel found that Labour ward parties in Reading in the 1950s had between 50 and 600 members and Conservative ward associations between 30 and 400 members.⁴⁰⁹

Littleborough LA had its own headquarters in the town in 1957,⁴¹⁰ and there are several examples of district LAs accumulating bank balances of over £100.⁴¹¹ Connahs Quay and Shotton LA was able to pay £400 towards an extension of the Flintshire East LA headquarters building in 1961;⁴¹² and Broughty Ferry LA, a branch of Dundee LA, had nearly £1,500 invested in a Buildings Fund in 1948.⁴¹³ For the most part, however, district

⁴⁰⁷ Croydon Liberal Papers, East Croydon Liberal Bulletin, No. 9, Nov 53

⁴⁰⁸ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 7 Nov 62; Southend West LA, Minutes, 24 Feb 61 (more than 100 members in seven of eight ward LAs), 10 Aug 62 (over 500 members in Chalkwell ward), 1 Mar 63; Surrey East LA, Minutes, 6 May 58, 17 May 60 (three branch LAs with over 100 members), 19 Jul 60, 19 Feb 63, 21 Jul 64, 1 Sep 64 (six branch LAs with over 100 members), 20 Jun 61, 18 Jul 61, 21 Nov 61, 20 Mar 62, 17 Apr 62, 16 Jul 63 (seven branch LAs with over 100 members), 29 May 62 (nine branch LAs with over 100 members); Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 7 Dec 55, 1 Aug 56, 4 Sep 56, 7 Nov 56 (Higham Hill and St James Street ward LAs); Newbury LA, Minutes, 30 Jan 62 (497 members in Newbury town LA); Harborough LA, Minutes, 9 Mar 61; Littleborough LA, List of Members, 1955 (269 members); some ward LAs in Manchester claimed over 100 members in the late 1950s as a result of including the memberships of local Liberal clubs, Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 8 Jul 58

⁴⁰⁹ Turner, Labour’s Doorstep Politics in London, pp127, 132 and Blondel, “The Political Structure of Reading”, pp136, 201

⁴¹⁰ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 14 May 57, 31 May 57, 30 Oct 57

⁴¹¹ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 15 May 63; Harborough LA, Minutes, 20 Mar 58 (Braunstone LA)

⁴¹² Chester Chronicle, 21 Jan 61

⁴¹³ Broughty Ferry LA, Minutes, 6 Nov 42, 4 Nov 43, 1 Apr 48

LAs were small organisations with fewer than 50 members and rarely more than £10 or £20 in the bank. The Executive Committee of Enfield West Ward LA opined in 1949 that a ward organisation could operate successfully with a dozen “working members”; Southey LA in Sheffield was established in 1961 with just five members, although it failed to thrive; and three ward LAs in Walthamstow were left penniless after the 1954 local elections.⁴¹⁴

One of the main problems faced by district LAs was a high membership turnover, as illustrated by Table 10.

Table 10: Members’ Register, Newbury Constituency LA, 1959–64

District LA	Number of members paying a subscription					
	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Newbury East	31	52	209	167	164	17
Newbury West	35	29	90	118	78	6
Newbury North	10	19	42	51	14	0
Tilehurst	4	9	15	76	285	18
Norcot	0	0	3	47	12	0
Thatcham	6	20	24	65	22	0
Theale	0	0	1	12	5	0
Aldermaston	1	2	23	140	7	0
Boxford	12	5	24	14	2	0
Lambourn	5	2	14	18	0	0
Pangbourne	0	0	1	0	36	1
Hungerford	0	0	1	6	0	0
None ⁴¹⁵	35	15	44	36	13	0
Total	139	153	491	750	638	42

Table 10 shows how many subscriptions were collected in each of the districts of Newbury LA from 1959 to 1964. Membership of the LA increased dramatically during the early

⁴¹⁴ Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 2 Aug 49 and see Enfield West LA, Minutes, 9 Jan 50, Southey LA, Minutes, 15 Jun 61, Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 19 May 54

⁴¹⁵ It was often possible for Liberals to subscribe to the constituency LA without joining a district LA

1960s but membership gains could easily be lost if concerted efforts to collect subscriptions were not made. Thus the membership of Aldermaston LA fell from 140 in 1962 to seven in 1963; and subscriptions were not collected at all in Lambourn and Hungerford in 1963. The figures for 1964, which show the number of subscriptions collected by the middle of the year rather than by the end, emphasise that district LAs had to revisit their members annually in order to collect subscriptions, on top of any fresh recruitment work. In total, 1,852 people are listed as having paid a subscription to one of the district LAs in the Newbury division during the period from 1959 to 1964 but only one of these — a Mr Penn in the Newbury West ward — paid a subscription in each year. This rate of membership turnover was higher than that considered above average in the Labour Party: Turner reported that an annual membership turnover rate of 30 per cent in South Kensington was considered high.⁴¹⁶

ROLE

In some places, district LAs were the basic unit of organisation in the Liberal Party, and district LAs sometimes dominated weak constituency organisations. Elsewhere district LAs barely existed or constituency LAs sought to exert close control over district LAs, particularly in order to ensure that income from subscriptions was passed fully and quickly to the constituency organisation.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Turner, Labour's Doorstep Politics in London, p160

⁴¹⁷ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 5 Mar 53, 15 Apr 53

District LAs were often keen to exert influence over matters normally reserved for constituency LAs. The Bognor Regis branch of Chichester LA, for instance, passed a motion in January 1949 lamenting the absence of a parliamentary candidate for the division and, when a prospective candidate was approached without reference to the branch's Executive Committee later in the year, the branch chairman and secretary both resigned.⁴¹⁸ Leeds North Ward LA proposed a scheme in 1949 whereby Liberals throughout northern Leeds would cooperate to ensure that Liberal efforts at the next general election were focused on the Leeds North constituency, at the expense of the North East and North West divisions, although nothing came of the plan.⁴¹⁹ Littleborough LA debated in June 1951 whether the Heywood and Royton constituency should be contested by a Liberal candidate at the forthcoming general election, and resolved in January 1953 that a parliamentary candidate was required "to hold the association together".⁴²⁰ The district LAs of Enfield West LA played a significant part in parliamentary candidate selection. Potters Bar LA was recorded as having adopted a prospective parliamentary candidate in May 1950 and the Executive Committee of Enfield West LA decided by eight votes to six in December 1950 not to select a new prospective parliamentary candidate until the ward LAs had been consulted.⁴²¹ Harwich branch LA submitted a list of possible parliamentary candidates to the Home Counties Liberal Federation in 1954 and invited one of the possible candidates to address the branch, prompting the constituency LA to resolve that, in future, it should

⁴¹⁸ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 5 Jan 49, 27 Jul 49, 12 Sep 49

⁴¹⁹ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 18 Jul 49

⁴²⁰ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 18 Jun 51, 19 Jan 53, and Papers, letter from B. Hall to I. Eastwood, 26 Jan 53

⁴²¹ Enfield West LA, Minutes, 11 Dec 50, Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 22 May 50

handle all such correspondence.⁴²² Branch organisations in Inverness and Penrith and the Border also took an active part in the selection of parliamentary candidates.⁴²³

Littleborough Liberals debated on several occasions whether the constituency LA could afford its office accommodation.⁴²⁴ The Croydon South Ward LA was instrumental in the establishment of Croydon Transport Users' Association, which campaigned for the retention of the rail link to Sanderstead, in 1963.⁴²⁵ Sittingbourne LA paid a six guineas affiliation fee to the Home Counties Liberal Federation when it was re-formed in March 1961, although it was not a constituency organisation.⁴²⁶ The subscription to the East Kent Liberal Council, due later in 1961, was also paid jointly by the Sittingbourne and Sheppey district LAs.⁴²⁷ When the Faversham constituency LA was re-established in 1962 it was noted that the Sittingbourne branch LA had traditionally acted as if it were the divisional association.⁴²⁸ Adelaide Ward LA, Hampstead, attempted to reverse the constituency LA's decision in 1952 not to contest the London County Council elections, promising to find £50 to fund a candidate.⁴²⁹

⁴²² Harwich LA, Minutes, 18 Oct 54, 25 Nov 54 and see 22 Jul 55 for further correspondence between the branch, the LPO, and a prospective parliamentary candidate

⁴²³ Inverness LA, Minutes, 1 Jul 47, 30 Oct 50, Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 50

⁴²⁴ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 30 Nov 53, 11 Jan 54, 8 Mar 54

⁴²⁵ Croydon Liberal Papers, election literature

⁴²⁶ Sittingbourne LA, Minutes, 20 Mar 61

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 Jul 61

⁴²⁸ Faversham LA, Minutes, 16 Apr 62

⁴²⁹ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 18 Feb 52, 10 Mar 52

There was considerable scope for district LAs to act independently of divisional organisations in areas which, unlike parliamentary candidate selection, were not clearly the responsibility of constituency organisations. Bognor Regis Liberals ran a members' newsletter, Challenge, which was taken up by Chichester LA in 1959 for distribution throughout the constituency. Bognor Regis LA refused a request to abandon its own branch newsletter in favour of the constituency-wide organ for two years and the branch newsletter was revived only nine months after it was eventually discontinued.⁴³⁰ Bognor Regis LA, rather than the Chichester constituency LA, also nominated a Liberal to be appointed as a Justice of the Peace in 1960.⁴³¹ North Ward LA, the most active Liberal organisation in the Leeds North division, was asked to appoint an organiser to work throughout the constituency in 1949.⁴³² Perhaps most unusually, Enfield West Ward LA formed a boys' football team in 1950, which it was hoped might be the basis for a Liberal youth club.⁴³³

One factor which determined the influence district LAs could exert over constituency LAs was the extent to which the Liberal Party's strength was concentrated in a small part of a constituency. This was particularly significant in rural constituencies, where it was common for Liberal strength to be focused in one or two towns and for other towns and villages to be devoid of Liberal activity. Bognor Regis was the centre of Liberal activity

⁴³⁰ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 16 Apr 59, 12 Jan 61, 13 Oct 61; for other examples of branch newsletters being taken up by constituency LAs see Godstone LA, Minutes, 23 Oct 62, Harborough LA, Minutes, 7 Sep 48, Harwich LA, Minutes, 2 May 58, Higham Hill (Walthamstow) LA, Minutes, 21 May 62, 12 Jun 62, 7 Aug 62; and see Surrey East LA, Minutes, 16 Aug 60 for reference to Couldson LA newsletter

⁴³¹ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 15 Jun 60, 29 Jul 60

⁴³² Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 26 Sep 49

⁴³³ Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 19 Jun 50, 4 Sep 50, 9 Oct 50, 18 Oct 50

in the Chichester constituency between 1945 and 1964 and, as a consequence, the branch LA was able to exert a disproportionate influence over the activities of the constituency organisation. When Liberal activity in the area was revived in 1957 it was the Bognor Regis LA, rather than the Chichester constituency LA, which was re-formed. It was decided not to define the boundaries of the district LA so that it was, in effect, the constituency LA, until other branches were re-formed. As such, the branch LA requested the funds of the previous Chichester LA which were being held by the Home Counties Liberal Federation, but was refused.⁴³⁴ Bognor Regis Liberals had a hand in re-forming the district LAs in the city of Chichester, Yapton, Selsey, Southbourne and Pagham before the constituency LA was fully revived.⁴³⁵ The strength of the Liberal Party in particular towns or villages could be strongly linked to religious or voluntary groups. On its formation in 1949 Bollington LA, in Cheshire, drew its membership from subscribers to a 1946 fund for “bombed out” children, which itself succeeded a 1943 voluntary organisation based on the village’s Wesleyan Methodist Society.⁴³⁶

Where branch LAs were stronger and more powerful than constituency LAs, disputes about whether constituency organisations were properly constituted could arise. Dunbartonshire West LA was revived in 1962, but a representative of the Scottish Liberal Party attended the inaugural general meeting to question whether the constituency LA could be re-formed given that its membership was based entirely in Dumbarton.⁴³⁷ It was agreed that the constituency LA could be established if recruitment in other parts of the constituency

⁴³⁴ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 2 Nov 57, 12 Nov 57

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 3 Mar 58, 21 Apr 58, 8 Sep 58, 20 Oct 58, 20 Jul 59, 7 Dec 59, 28 Sep 62

⁴³⁶ Bollington LA, Minutes, 1949–53

⁴³⁷ Dunbartonshire West LA, Minutes, 21 Mar 62

began straight away but it proved possible only to attract members in Helensburgh, where a viable Liberal organisation had existed until 1948. In August 1962, for instance, only eleven of the LA's 160 members were resident outside of Helensburgh or Dumbarton;⁴³⁸ in December 1962, 30 of the 195 LA members, aside from the Young Liberals, came from beyond those two towns.⁴³⁹ There was evidence of conflict between the two main branches but Dumbarton LA declined in strength due to financial mismanagement and the inactivity of the officers until, by 1964, it had vanished altogether.⁴⁴⁰ By this time, Helensburgh LA dominated the constituency LA, profits from the dances organised by its Young Liberals being the primary reason why the possibility of standing a candidate in the 1964 general election was contemplated.⁴⁴¹ Once the decision not to fight the election was made it was decided to "let the constituency association go to sleep ... [in order to] concentrate on the branches and on getting new branches formed".⁴⁴² A similar situation arose in the Farnworth constituency in the early 1960s when the Liberal Party was revived in the town of Kearsley, but not in the constituency's other towns. Kearsley LA operated quite independently of any constituency-wide organisation from its formation in 1962 until 1974.⁴⁴³

Constituency LAs also tended to be weak in large constituencies containing several significant towns which each had weak Liberal branch organisations. Efforts were made

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 8 Aug 62

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 17 Dec 62

⁴⁴⁰ For conflict see Ibid., 7 Jan 63, 4 Feb 63, 20 Mar 63, 17 Jun 63, 19 Aug 63, 5 Sep 63, 3 Feb 64; for the decline of Dumbarton LA see 27 Jun 62, 19 Aug 62, 5 Nov 62, 13 May 63, 26 Feb 64, 24 Jun 64

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 25 Oct 63, 15 Nov 63, 3 Feb 64, 26 Feb 64, 17 Mar 64

⁴⁴² Ibid., 24 Jun 64

⁴⁴³ Interview, John Rothwell and see p292

to establish a Faversham constituency LA in the aftermath of the 1950 election which would be based on three branches covering Faversham and East Swale, Sittingbourne and West Swale, and Sheerness and the Isle of Sheppey.⁴⁴⁴ Arrangements were made for the financial relationship between the branch and constituency LAs and for the selection of a parliamentary candidate but the Faversham branch LA was never organised and the Sheppey LA met on only a handful of occasions.⁴⁴⁵ In practice, the only active Liberal group was based in Sittingbourne and the constituency LA disappeared when the social events organised by Sittingbourne LA failed to attract sufficient support.⁴⁴⁶ When Liberal activity in the area revived in 1958 the Sittingbourne LA was refounded four years before the Faversham constituency LA was again established.⁴⁴⁷ Even so, it proved impossible to form a Liberal branch in the town of Faversham.⁴⁴⁸ Liberal activity in the Enfield West constituency in the early 1950s was concentrated in Potters Bar and the West and South West wards of Enfield and it proved difficult to organise social events and other activities which brought activists from Potters Bar and Enfield together.⁴⁴⁹ Financial problems and the inability of the LA to attract a prospective parliamentary candidate led to discussion in 1951 of the possibility of the constituency LA being disbanded so that the branch LAs

⁴⁴⁴ Faversham LA, Minutes, 28 Feb 50

⁴⁴⁵ For finances see Faversham LA, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 16 Mar 50, Executive Committee, Minutes, 17 Mar 50; for candidate selection see Sheppey LA, Minutes, 28 Mar 50, Sittingbourne LA, Minutes, 31 Mar 50

⁴⁴⁶ See Faversham LA, Minutes, 16 Mar 50, Sittingbourne LA, Minutes, 16 Feb 51

⁴⁴⁷ Sittingbourne LA, Minutes, 8 May 58, Faversham LA, Minutes, 19 Mar 62

⁴⁴⁸ Faversham LA, Minutes, 23 Jul 63, 29 Nov 63

⁴⁴⁹ Enfield West LA, Minutes, 28 Nov 49, 10 Dec 51

could concentrate on their own activities and helping neighbouring LAs such as those at Barnet and Southgate contest parliamentary elections.⁴⁵⁰

Weak branch organisations tended to undermine the viability of constituency LAs. A report presented to the Political Committee of Altrincham and Sale LA in 1953, for instance, painted a bleak picture of inactivity amongst the constituency's three district organisations which, if the districts' executive committees did not increase their workload, would lead to the constituency LA letting go of its prospective parliamentary candidate and "reverting" to being a purely social organisation.⁴⁵¹ It was reported in December 1962 that there were two ward LAs in the Clapham constituency, but these were not mentioned in the minutes of the constituency LA's Executive Committee in 1963 or 1964 and made no contribution to the finances of the constituency LA in 1964.⁴⁵² Despite this, the constituency LA adopted a constitution in 1963 which made detailed provisions for the removal of ward officers acting "in a way prejudicial to the constitution and/or the aims of the association ... and/or the aims of the Liberal Party".⁴⁵³ This reflected the ease with which insubstantial branch LAs could become power bases for renegade Liberals keen to express views at odds with the mainstream of the Party, as shown by the LA's dispute with its PPC, David Russell.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 9 Apr 51, 10 Sep 51, 6 Nov 51

⁴⁵¹ Altrincham and Sale LA, Political Committee, Minutes, 11 Feb 53

⁴⁵² Clapham LA, Minutes, 4 Dec 62, 22 Feb 65

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 22 Jan 63

⁴⁵⁴ See pp79–80; for other problem district LAs see Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 29 Aug 50, and Papers, letter from E. Steele to Mr Biley, 1 Sep 50

FINANCE

The financial relationships between constituency and district LAs differed from division to division and had little to do with the advice on the subject offered by the LPO. Financial wrangles between constituency and district LAs were as common during the 1945–64 period as those between constituency LAs and the LPO. Constituency LAs frequently proposed new methods to determine the financial contributions which they were entitled to receive from district LAs. These were not always accepted by the district organisations and, even when they were, their implementation was often far from perfect.

Resources

Table 11 gives an indication of the financial resources available to district LAs during the years from 1945 to 1964.

Table 11: Income of District LAs

Source of Income	Littleborough LA 1963 ⁴⁵⁵	Bognor Regis LA 1958–59 ⁴⁵⁶	Godstone LA 1953 ⁴⁵⁷	Guisborough LA 1947–48 ⁴⁵⁸
Subscriptions	£128 12s 6d	£37 1s 3d	£7 16s 0d	
Bazaar/fete/sales	£171 18s 7d	£28 16s 2½ d		
Draws/lotteries/ pools	£69 18s 5d	£1 4s 3d		
Interest				£1 2s 7d
Social events	£17 9s 4d	£9 14s 9d	£28 3s 1d	£38 13s 7d
Room lettings	£2 0s 0d			
Sundries		£0 3s 11d	£2 0s 0d	
Total	£389 18s 10d	£77 0s 4½ d	£37 19s 1d	£48 2s 8d

Table 11 illustrates the range of resources available to district LAs. Littleborough LA’s income in 1963 was on a par with a moderate sized constituency LA and was drawn from a wide range of sources, including individual subscribers, several sales and the pools scheme operated by the Liberal Development Society. Guisborough LA in 1947–48, and Godstone LA in 1953, were impoverished, however. Any subscriptions collected in Guisborough were passed directly through to Cleveland constituency LA and the branch organisation relied entirely on a series of seven social events, one of which made a loss. Godstone LA relied almost entirely on the profits made from whist drives in order to survive and its 25 subscribers paid only 6s 3d per person into the branch’s funds in that year. District LAs could exist with even less income than that shown in Table 11 to have been earned by Guisborough and Godstone LAs. Hoe Street Ward LA in Walthamstow had

⁴⁵⁵ Littleborough LA, Papers, Income and Expenditure, 1963

⁴⁵⁶ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 10 Apr 59

⁴⁵⁷ Godstone LA, Minutes, 8 Jan 54

⁴⁵⁸ Guisborough LA, Minutes, 7 Sep 48. The accounts presented spanned the period from October 1946 to April 1948

an income of just £6 1s 0d in 1958, being split between profits from whist drives and subscriptions.⁴⁵⁹

Table 12 shows how the income of district LAs could vary considerably from one year to the next.

Table 12: Income of Littleborough LA 1956–57 and 1959–64⁴⁶⁰

Source of Income	1956	1957	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Subscriptions	£13 15s 0d	£38 8s 0d	£33 18s 6d	£51 6s 0d	£49 11s 6d	£37 17s 7d	£128 12s 6d	£75 10s 0d
Bazaar/fete/sales		£16 13s 6d	£126 15s 3½d	£118 13s 3d			£171 18s 7d	£71 18s 3d
Draws/lotteries/pools				£2 5s 8d			£69 18s 5d	£76 3s 10d
Social events	£5 9s 7d	£18 14s 4d	£17 15s 6d	£9 1s 9d		£23 1s 0d	£17 9s 4d	£4 16s 9d
Other	£2 17s 6d	£20 9s 10d	£15 0s 5d	£105 13s 10d	£1 0s 0d		£2 0s 0d	£28 2s 0d
Total	£22 2s 1d	£94 5s 8d	£193 9s 8½d	£287 0s 6d	£50 11s 6d	£60 18s 7d	£389 18s 10d	£256 10s 10d

The income of Littleborough LA was approximately nineteen times greater in 1963 than in 1956. The size of the branch’s income primarily depended on whether or not a large annual bazaar was organised, and on the success of the event. The bazaars of 1959, 1960, 1963 and 1964 contributed between 25 and 55 per cent of the total income of the branch in each year. Subscription income also varied dramatically, more than trebling from 1962 to 1963, before declining by 41 per cent in 1964.

None of the district LAs featured in Tables 11 and 12 received any funding from constituency LAs, demonstrating the extent to which Liberal district organisations tended to be reliant on their own resources. District LAs rarely asked for money from constituency

⁴⁵⁹ Hoe Street LA (Walthamstow), Minutes, 9 Feb 59

⁴⁶⁰ Littleborough LA, Papers, Income and Expenditure

LAs, and Bognor Regis LA resolved in 1958 that it ought not to trouble Chichester constituency LA for funds on principle.⁴⁶¹ Money was sometimes made available to help district LAs fight local elections,⁴⁶² establish new district LAs,⁴⁶³ and organise social events.⁴⁶⁴ Constituency LAs sometimes found themselves responsible for the debts incurred by district LAs. Leeds South LA resolved in 1950 to pay off its ward LAs' debts because it was "from the wards that we are formed as a divisional association".⁴⁶⁵

Expenditure

Table 13 gives an indication of how district LAs spent their money.

⁴⁶¹ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 20 Oct 58

⁴⁶² Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 29 Feb 60, Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 28 Jun 45, 14 Aug 45, 11 Oct 45; and see pp152–53

⁴⁶³ Harwich LA, Minutes, 3 Apr 59, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 10 May 44, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 26 Jul 50, Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 10 Mar 49

⁴⁶⁴ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 23 Sep 47, 13 Apr 50

⁴⁶⁵ Leeds South LA, Minutes, 26 Jun 50; and see below for examples of district LAs being responsible for the debts of constituency organisations

Table 13: Expenditure of District LAs

Expenditure	Littleborough LA 1963 ⁴⁶⁶	Bognor Regis LA 1958–59 ⁴⁶⁷	Coulsdon LA 1962–63 ⁴⁶⁸	Guisborough LA 1947–48 ⁴⁶⁹
Property	£132 7s 8d			
Local elections	£61 3s 7d		£39 12s 6d	
To constituency LA	£60 0s 0d	£10 0s 0d	£70 0s 0d	£35 0s 0d
To Young Liberals	£2 12s 0d		£3 10s 0d	
Printing, postage, telephone	£5 18s 5d	£40 11s 1d	£20 18s 4d	
Meetings		£18 5s 6d		£0 15s 0d
Social events		£0 17s 6d	£11 17s 1d	
Others	£1 12s 6d	£1 14s 2d	£1 4s 0d	
Total	£263 14s 2d	£71 8s 2d	£147 1s 11d	£35 15s 0d

It was unusual for a district LA not to make some contribution to a constituency LA but, especially for relatively vibrant district LAs such as that in Littleborough, that contribution was not normally the main item of expenditure by the district body. Bognor Regis LA spent most of its income on organising meetings and the distribution of literature, including its branch newsletter and referendum cards for recruitment. Where local elections were fought by Liberals, including in Littleborough, these were usually a major item of expenditure for district LAs. As has been noted, Littleborough LA was a distinctive district LA in that it had its own rooms which were the major source of expenditure by the town's Liberals.

⁴⁶⁶ Littleborough LA, Papers, Income and Expenditure, 1963

⁴⁶⁷ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 10 Apr 59

⁴⁶⁸ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 9 Jan 63

⁴⁶⁹ Guisborough LA, Minutes, 7 Sep 48. The accounts presented spanned the period from October 1946 to April 1948

Relationship with Constituency LAs

In practice, as in theory, the financial relationship between constituency and district LAs was rarely well defined. Most constituency LAs expected to receive all of the subscriptions collected by district LAs but it was difficult for this arrangement to be enforced, particularly when ward LAs were short of funds,⁴⁷⁰ and an additional problem was that it gave no financial incentive for district LAs to recruit members.⁴⁷¹ These problems encouraged new schemes for the fair and efficient allocation of income between constituency and district LAs to be devised, but few constituency LAs wholeheartedly embraced the quota scheme recommended by the LPO in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁴⁷²

In many constituencies, formal arrangements for the income of district LAs to be channelled towards constituency LAs did not exist. The financial relationship between Cambridgeshire LA and its handful of district LAs, for example, was not discussed by the divisional Executive Committee from 1945 until September 1960, when branch LAs were asked to earmark a proportion of the profits earned by winter social activities for the constituency LA.⁴⁷³ In cases such as this there was little concept of the need for district LAs to make a regular contribution to the funds of constituency LAs. Thus, the contribution made by Leeds North Ward LA to the Leeds North divisional LA in 1948 was described as a “donation”.⁴⁷⁴ Constituency LAs would regularly grumble that district LAs

⁴⁷⁰ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 28 Jul 49

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 3 Feb 49, 18 Jan 51, and Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 28 Sep 62

⁴⁷² See London Liberal Party, Minutes, 17 Jun 57 for advice from the LPO on quota schemes within LAs

⁴⁷³ Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 16 Sep 60

⁴⁷⁴ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 8 Nov 48

were not pulling their weight or were holding on to considerable bank balances while the constituency organisation was short of funds.⁴⁷⁵ The combined bank balances of district LAs could sometimes be four or five times greater than constituency LAs' bank balances.⁴⁷⁶

Many district LAs contributed to the finances of constituency LAs on an ad hoc basis, often once major items of expenditure, such as local election campaigns, had been paid for. Grants would sometimes be made only when a certain level of bank balance had been exceeded, that level occasionally being formally agreed.⁴⁷⁷ Adverse financial conditions could lead to district LAs ceasing to contribute to constituency LAs, including those organisations which were previously assiduous in meeting their obligations under quota schemes.⁴⁷⁸ General election campaigns could prompt district LAs to hand over all their financial resources to the constituency LA's fighting fund, as happened at Guisborough in 1945 and Godstone in 1959 and 1964.⁴⁷⁹ Parliamentary candidates could be instrumental in redefining the financial relationship between branch and constituency LAs, such as in Harwich in 1955.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁵ Chester LA, Social Committee, Minutes, 3 Dec 45, Hampstead LA, Minutes, 18 May 50, Inverness LA, Minutes, 14 Oct 55

⁴⁷⁶ See for instance, Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 8 Sep 64, Harwich LA, Minutes, 27 Feb 53, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 10 Dec 56, 21 Oct 57, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 21 Feb 61, 24 May 61, 26 Sep 62

⁴⁷⁷ Bognor Regis, Minutes, 11 Sep 51, 19 Jan 59, 15 Sep 59, 26 Jun 61, 24 Nov 61, 1 May 62, 30 Nov 62, 10 Dec 63, 7 Jan 64, 25 Aug 64, Pagham LA, Minutes, 30 Jul 64, 17 Sep 64, Harborough LA, Minutes, 11 Aug 48, Inverness LA, Minutes, 4 May 62, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 26 Sep 62

⁴⁷⁸ For instance, Littleborough LA, Minutes, 31 May 54, 29 Nov 54, 3 Apr 56, 18 Jul 58

⁴⁷⁹ Guisborough LA, Minutes, 2 Jun 45, Godstone LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 59, 15 Mar 65

⁴⁸⁰ Harwich LA, Minutes, 15 Aug 55, 7 Oct 55; see p87

Where it was expected that all of the membership subscriptions collected by district LAs should be passed through to constituency LAs, motions to alter this state of affairs were not unusual.⁴⁸¹ Reform usually entailed modifying the existing relationship between district and constituency LAs rather than the establishment of quota schemes. Southend West LA decided that ward LAs should be allowed to retain ten per cent of all subscription income but this scheme was never fully implemented.⁴⁸² Inverness LA had a number of different arrangements for the transfer of funds from branch LAs to the divisional body, including that one shilling per member should be sent to the constituency LA, but it was reported in 1955 that the constituency organisation had received just £11 from subscriptions in two years.⁴⁸³ Cumberland North LA rejected a quota system in 1948 in favour of the more organised collection of subscriptions.⁴⁸⁴ Surrey East LA requested that its branch LAs contribute 25 per cent of all subscriptions and donations, and profits from social events, to the constituency LA every six months.⁴⁸⁵ Walthamstow West LA allowed ward LAs to retain the first one shilling of income per subscription, but expected to receive all revenue from that source over that amount.⁴⁸⁶ An exception to this trend was Leicester South East LA which decided in 1963 that all subscription income should be received by the

⁴⁸¹ For example, Leeds North Ward LA, Papers, letter from Donald Wade, Chairman, North Leeds LA to all ward LA treasurers, 11 Aug 45 and Minutes, 14 Aug 45; see also Faversham LA, Minutes, 30 Apr 62; Hampstead LA, Minutes, 19 May 49; Harwich LA, Minutes, 17 Mar 50, 1 Nov 52

⁴⁸² Southend West LA, Minutes, 13 Dec 57, 10 Jan 58

⁴⁸³ Inverness LA, Minutes, 10 Feb 55, 14 Oct 55, and see 21 Feb 58

⁴⁸⁴ Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 25 Sep 48

⁴⁸⁵ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 25 Mar 58, and objection 21 Jun 60

⁴⁸⁶ Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 28 Mar 51; a similar situation was reported earlier in the East division, Wood Street LA, Minutes, 13 Jul 48

constituency LA , rather than one-third being retained by district bodies, as had previously occurred.⁴⁸⁷

The financial arrangements of Enfield West LA provide a good example of the development of the financial relationship between district and constituency LAs. The district LAs which were part of Enfield West LA were supposed to pay one shilling per member to the constituency body,⁴⁸⁸ but, in 1950, only one district LA made contributions on this basis.⁴⁸⁹ Potters Bar LA, the largest district LA in the constituency, owed the constituency association 70 shillings.⁴⁹⁰ No action was proposed to ensure that district LAs paid their dues to the constituency LA and, by 1952, the shilling scheme appears to have been abandoned in favour of a request to district LAs to contribute “some” of their Christmas draw proceeds to help pay off a loan of £45 owed by the constituency LA.⁴⁹¹ In November 1953 it was again decided that district LAs should contribute to the constituency LA according to the size of their membership, it having been noted that the constituency LA had received no funds from the districts during the previous year.⁴⁹² Two months later the constituency LA made another appeal for cash from the district LAs. The constituency LA was unable to pay its five guineas subscription to the LPO although one of its district LAs, the Enfield North LA, had a bank balance of over £20.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁷ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 23 Mar 50, 15 May 58, 20 Sep 63, and see 31 Mar 58

⁴⁸⁸ Enfield West LA, Minutes, 17 Jul 50

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 Dec 50

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 Jan 51

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14 Jan 52 and 17 Nov 52, when £15 was still owed

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 10 Nov 53

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 28 Jan 54

Profits from social events were sometimes used as the basis of the contributions from district to constituency LAs, despite the uncertainty associated with the organisation and profitability of such events.⁴⁹⁴ Inverness LA asked its district LAs to hold two social events per year, the profits of which would go entirely to the constituency body.⁴⁹⁵ Hampstead LA gave ward LAs a target of £100 each to raise from a bazaar in 1947 and a target of £35 each in 1950.⁴⁹⁶ By October 1950, when it was anticipated that Hampstead LA's expenditure for the year would top £1,000, only one ward LA had contributed £35 and two had made no contribution to the constituency LA's funds.⁴⁹⁷ Ward LAs were asked to organise more profitable social events but this led to criticism that the borough's Liberals were becoming unduly obsessed with social events at the expense of political discussion and electioneering.⁴⁹⁸ A policy of eschewing social events in favour of more overtly political activities lasted for two years before ward LAs were asked to contribute 50 per cent of the profits from social events to the constituency LA.⁴⁹⁹

There are a number of examples of quota schemes being established and they were usually well received in principle by district LAs.⁵⁰⁰ Quota schemes did sometimes operate

⁴⁹⁴ See for instance Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 30 Apr 48, 16 Jun 50, 21 May 64, 11 Jun 64, Harborough LA, Minutes, 11 Aug 48, Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 2 May 46, 13 Jul 46, and Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 23 Apr 49

⁴⁹⁵ Inverness LA, Minutes, 5 Nov 54

⁴⁹⁶ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 23 Sep 47, 13 Apr 50

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 Oct 50

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 Sep 50, 2 Mar 51, 20 Mar 51

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 Nov 53, 20 Sep 54; and see p67

⁵⁰⁰ For instance Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 45, Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 25 Oct 58, 25 Apr 59, Southend West LA, Minutes, 20 Sep 63, Godstone LA, Minutes, 11 Mar 64, and Surrey East LA, Minutes, 20 Jun 61, 19 Jun 62

successfully,⁵⁰¹ although district LAs often balked at the size of the payments they were expected to make on a regular basis,⁵⁰² which could lead to schemes being withdrawn or abandoned.⁵⁰³ Constituency LAs could also take the lead in modifying quota schemes so that district LAs would be better able to comply with them. Heywood and Royton LA set a quota of £65 for Littleborough LA in 1949, but this had been reduced to £40 in 1951 and to just £10 by 1952, although it was increased again in 1953.⁵⁰⁴ Surrey East LA allowed Sanderstead South branch LA to offset its local election expenses against its quota payment in 1962.⁵⁰⁵ Manchester Liberal Federation promised in 1963 to set aside one third of the quota payments made by ward LAs in the city for constituency LAs fighting the next general election in an effort to boost contributions to the quota scheme it had established one year earlier.⁵⁰⁶

Several examples exist of constituency and branch LAs agreeing on schemes for dividing financial resources between them, but of such schemes not being fully implemented.⁵⁰⁷ The Bognor Regis and Pagham branches of Chichester LA appeared to accept in principle that

⁵⁰¹ Guisborough LA, Minutes, 11 Mar 49, Littleborough LA, Minutes, 11 Jul 49, 6 Oct 49, 23 Jan 50, Torrington Area LA, Minutes, 11 Oct 60, Harborough LA, Minutes, 15 Mar 62, and Southend West LA, Minutes, 24 Feb 61

⁵⁰² For example, Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 26 Nov 45, Surrey East LA, Minutes, 21 May 63, 19 Nov 63, Coulsdon and Purley LA, Minutes, 10 Apr 63, Southend West LA, Minutes, 8 Jan 60, and Pudsey LA, Minutes, 18 Oct 57, 7 Feb 58, 20 Nov 59, 13 Jul 62

⁵⁰³ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 3 Oct 47, Hampstead LA, Minutes, 10 Mar 52, 23 Nov 53, Pudsey LA, Minutes, 17 Jul 64

⁵⁰⁴ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 11 Jul 49, 10 Jul 52, 16 Feb 53 and Papers, letter from C. Landale, Treasurer, Heywood and Royton LA, to branch LAs' treasurers, 20 Nov 51

⁵⁰⁵ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 16 Oct 62

⁵⁰⁶ Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 15 Jan 63

⁵⁰⁷ For instance see Godstone LA, Minutes, 27 Oct 53, 22 Sep 54, 4 Mar 59, Guisborough LA, Minutes, 31 Mar 48

they should make contributions to the constituency organisation according to the size of their memberships during the 1958–64 period, but, in practice, the quotas thus set were not met.⁵⁰⁸ Westbury LA requested a quota payment from its branches for the first time in 1953, but Bradford-on-Avon LA paid only £10 of its £80 quota before Liberal activities in the town were adjourned for five years.⁵⁰⁹ In 1959 the Bradford-on-Avon LA's quota was £100 and it was agreed that all of the income derived by the branch should be sent directly to the constituency LA but, due to the dearth of Liberal activity in the town, no contribution was made to Westbury LA's funds until November 1961 and the contribution of £75 in January 1963 was described as "the best effort for many years".⁵¹⁰ Altrincham and Sale's district LAs had contributed around £10 per annum to the towns' constituency LA throughout the 1950s. In 1964, the constituency LA agreed a scheme whereby the two major district Liberal organisations were to contribute £140 per annum. One year later it was reported that the district LAs had contributed nothing to the constituency association.⁵¹¹ Lewisham North LA's ward organisations were expected to contribute £30 per annum to the constituency LA from June 1958, but no quota payments were received in 1958–59 and the size of quota payments requested was later reduced to £15.⁵¹² This change did not, however, prove immediately successful in encouraging ward LAs to contribute financially to the constituency LA,⁵¹³ although wards began making quota

⁵⁰⁸ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 30 Mar 60 (proposed quota based on 7s per member), 26 Jun 61 (proposed quota based on 3s per member and a proportion of the profits shared from all social events in which the constituency LA participated), 5 Apr 63, Pagham LA, Minutes, 29 May 64 (proposed quota based on 5s 6d per member)

⁵⁰⁹ Bradford-on-Avon LA, Minutes, 10 Jul 53

⁵¹⁰ Bradford-on-Avon LA, Minutes, 9 Jan 59, 25 Nov 61, 31 Mar 63

⁵¹¹ Altrincham and Sale LA, Minutes, 24 Mar 64, 7 Apr 65

⁵¹² Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 19 Jun 58, 27 Oct 59

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 14 Mar 60, 25 Apr 60

payments in May 1960.⁵¹⁴ Fewer wards contributed less money in total to Lewisham North LA in 1960–61 than in the previous year, leading to a new arrangement intended to ensure that weak ward LAs contributed something, however small, to the constituency LA every year.⁵¹⁵

Financial proposals from constituency LAs could be watered down by district organisations. Chichester LA proposed in 1949 that it receive 75 per cent of all the income raised by its branches from subscriptions. The Bognor Regis branch decided that it would give 10 per cent of all such income to the constituency LA until its bank balance exceeded £25 and that, in the meantime, it would hand over 75 per cent of the profit from its summer fete to Chichester LA. The branch LA subsequently decided to delay implementation of the plan to transfer 10 per cent of subscription income to Chichester LA for six months and a motion to retain all of the profits of the summer fete for the branch was debated, although voted down.⁵¹⁶ Chichester LA responded in October 1949 by requesting 50 per cent of all the money raised by branches from subscriptions during the calendar year. Bognor Regis Liberals noted this request but decided in March 1950 that it was unable to contribute financially to the constituency LA.⁵¹⁷

District LAs sometimes put conditions on their grants to constituency LAs. For instance, Bognor Regis LA decided in November 1958 not to contribute funds to Chichester LA's

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 17 May 60, 27 Jun 60, 22 Sep 60

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 17 Jan 62 and 2 Dec 63, when quota payment increased to £40

⁵¹⁶ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 5 Jul 49, 27 Jul 49, 12 Sep 49

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 10 Oct 49, 16 Mar 50

election fighting fund until a parliamentary candidate was adopted.⁵¹⁸ Guisborough LA stopped contributing funds to Cleveland LA in September 1948 for a similar reason.⁵¹⁹ Harwich town LA paid six pence per member to the constituency LA, but in 1953 refused to allow any of its contribution to be used to pay for a meeting held in Clacton, because of traditional antipathy between the Harwich and Clacton Liberals.⁵²⁰ Another approach was for district LAs to refuse to make or to reduce their contributions to constituency LAs because it was felt that the constituency organisation did not need the money. Thus, Littleborough Liberals decided in 1958 not to contribute to the Heywood and Royton constituency LA because that body had just earned £80 as a result of a successful bazaar.⁵²¹

Constituency LAs sometimes requested money from district LAs in relation to specific projects. Leeds North LA asked its ward organisations in 1947 for the money required to appoint an agent; the most active ward, North, could find only two guineas and indicated that this grant was all that could be spared during the calendar year.⁵²² Constituency LAs sometimes sought guarantees of finance from district bodies before major projects, such as the appointment of an agent, were undertaken.⁵²³ District LAs were sometimes held responsible for the debts incurred by constituency organisations.⁵²⁴ The branches of Royton

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 24 Nov 58

⁵¹⁹ Guisborough LA, Minutes, 7 Sep 48,

⁵²⁰ Harwich LA, Minutes, 12 Mar 53; Interview, Tom Dale

⁵²¹ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 3 Jan 58

⁵²² Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 31 Mar 47, £5 was also given when the constituency LA admitted that it had promised £50 to the Leeds Liberal Federation, 10 Jun 48

⁵²³ For instance, Inverness LA, Minutes, 14 May 57, Enfield West LA, Minutes, 12 Sep 49, Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 15 Jan 47

⁵²⁴ For instance, Inverness LA, Minutes, 14 Jul 55, Guisborough LA, Minutes, 23 Mar 50

constituency LA were held responsible for the debts of the constituency organisation, which were attributed to the failure of the branch LAs to meet their quota obligations, after it was wound up following the redistribution of seats in 1948.⁵²⁵

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The LPO did not offer clear advice to LAs on which bodies should be responsible for local government matters. The guidance given about where responsibility lay for the selection of candidates for local government elections changed during the 1950s and no formal advice was offered on such matters as the funding of local government elections and the coordination of matters relating to local government within and between constituencies even in the the Liberal Party's Local Government Handbook. The ways in which LAs dealt with these issues are the subject of this section.

Candidate Selection

A number of factors determined whether, and where, local government elections would be fought including local political deals and arrangements,⁵²⁶ finance and organisation,⁵²⁷ and perceptions of the likelihood of success.⁵²⁸ The calibre of candidates found to fight local

⁵²⁵ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 29 Jan 51, 19 Feb 51, and Papers, letter from T. Bowden to J.T. Rushworth, 11 Jan 51

⁵²⁶ For instance see Hampstead LA, Minutes, 23 Sep 47, 13 Feb 56, 26 Jun 56, Stockport LA, Local Government Sub-committee, Minutes, 13 Sep 45, 26 Sep 45, and Executive Committee, Minutes, 4 Oct 45, and North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 11 Oct 47

⁵²⁷ For instance see decision of Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 3 Apr 50 not to contest local elections due to lack of money

⁵²⁸ Interviews, Jean Sargent, Simon Knott

elections also influenced the decisions taken by LAs as to whether, and which wards, to contest. Littleborough LA's Executive Committee voted by a majority of one in 1951 to contest all four wards in the town after a debate in which it was argued that even Liberal-held wards should be left uncontested if candidates of sufficient quality could not be found.⁵²⁹ An unsuccessful search for a county council candidate to contest a Liberal-held seat, which lasted over four months, resulted in Littleborough LA resolving in 1955 to "leave the seat to the Conservatives".⁵³⁰ The targeting of resources into the most promising wards was rarely discussed by LAs and usually rejected.⁵³¹

It was extremely common for candidates for local government elections to be selected by district LAs acting alone, in the same way as candidates for parliamentary elections were chosen by constituency LAs without reference to the national party.⁵³² Even where this method of candidate selection was used, however, constituency LAs and other bodies often had a role to play. Leicester South East LA, for example, requested that its district LAs select candidates for the 1961 local elections by autumn 1960.⁵³³ Manchester Liberal Federation often exhorted ward LAs to fight local elections and, in 1952, its Municipal Sub-committee urged ward LAs to take more care when selecting candidates because "in

⁵²⁹ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 29 Mar 51, and Papers, letter from A. Berry to I. Eastwood, 13 Mar 51

⁵³⁰ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 4 Mar 55

⁵³¹ Walthamstow Liberal Council, Minutes, 2 Jul 58, 1 Oct 58, Surrey East LA, Organisation Committee, Minutes, 1 May 61

⁵³² Enfield West LA, Minutes, 20 Mar 51, 16 Apr 51, 10 Mar 52, Faversham LA, Minutes, 14 Apr 50, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 10 May 44, 11 Jan 45, 21 Feb 49, 21 Mar 49, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 12 Nov 51, 5 Apr 59, 20 Mar 63, Surrey East LA, Minutes, 26 Apr 60, 18 Nov 60, Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 56, Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 8 Feb 49 and Oldbury Weekly News, 7 Mar 58

⁵³³ Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 13 Jun 60 and see also Stockport LA, Minutes, 6 Dec 45, 3 Jan 46

the eyes of the general electorate the Party has lost both dignity and respect through far too many frivolous candidatures in the past”.⁵³⁴

Constituency LAs could exert influence over the selection of candidates for local government elections by insisting that district LAs make their choices from panels of candidates approved by the constituency body. Leeds South LA considered setting up a panel of local government candidates in 1949 and recommended two years later that the Leeds Liberal Federation should establish such an arrangement.⁵³⁵ There is little evidence of district LAs jealously preserving their rights to select local government candidates from interference by constituency LAs. Hunslet West LA, when asked by Leeds South constituency LA to select a local government candidate in 1950, considered that the divisional LA should take over responsibility for finding a candidate.⁵³⁶ Pudsey town LA was content for the constituency LA’s agent to seek out and interview potential candidates.⁵³⁷

The Executive Committee of Reigate constituency LA appointed a sub-committee for the scrutiny of local election candidates in 1962, but it seemed to have no involvement in the selection of local candidates in the Godstone district which was a matter left entirely to the branch LA.⁵³⁸ Leeds Liberal Federation and the LPO recommended a candidate to fight

⁵³⁴ Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 4 Nov 46, 8 Mar 49, 7 Oct 52, 9 Jul 57, 12 Jan 60

⁵³⁵ Leeds South LA, Minutes, 17 Jan 49, 24 May 51 and also Hampstead LA, Minutes, 20 Oct 52. A selection panel was proposed by Surrey East LA, Organising Committee, Minutes, 24 Jul 62, but was not established. There had briefly been a panel of local election candidates in Leeds in 1948 but it proved ineffective — Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 5 Jan 48, 8 Mar 48, 30 May 51

⁵³⁶ Leeds South LA, Minutes, 20 Mar 50

⁵³⁷ Pudsey LA, Minutes, 13 Apr 53, 4 Jan 54, 5 Sep 55, 27 Oct 55, 21 Feb 56

⁵³⁸ Godstone LA, Minutes, 7 Aug 62

Leeds North ward in 1945, but the final decision on adoption was left to the ward LA with no involvement from the constituency body.⁵³⁹ Liberal local election candidates in Littleborough were selected by the LA Executive Committee or, in some years, by a sub-committee specially formed for the purpose, without any involvement from the Heywood and Royton constituency LA.⁵⁴⁰ It is clear from the Executive Committee's minutes that the town's Liberal councillors largely determined candidate selection and election strategy.⁵⁴¹ In 1952, Littleborough and Wardle branch LAs worked together to select a county council candidate and organise his election campaign, again without reference to the constituency LA.⁵⁴²

Where constituency LAs chose local government candidates, such as in Sheffield Heeley, this was often due to district LAs being weak or non-existent.⁵⁴³ Newbury divisional LA selected local government candidates in 1960 and 1961 but devolved selection to ward and branch organisations in June 1961 as such bodies became more numerous and well-established.⁵⁴⁴ The divisional LA retained some influence in the selection process via an advisory committee.⁵⁴⁵ Elsewhere, constituency LAs sometimes retained their powers to

⁵³⁹ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 4 Oct 45; the ward LA selected its candidate for the 1949 local elections without reference to other Liberal organisations, 8 Nov 48, 13 Dec 48

⁵⁴⁰ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 14 Feb 49, 4 Apr 49, 5 Apr 50, 19 Jan 53, 30 Mar 53, 11 Jan 54, 21 Feb 57, 3 Apr 64

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1 Mar 51, 8 Mar 54, 11 Oct 54, 8 Nov 54, 29 Jan 60

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 18 Feb 52

⁵⁴³ Sheffield Heeley LA, Minutes, 7 Dec 61, 6 Mar 62, 20 Mar 62, Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 14 Jan 61, Southport LA, Minutes, 17 May 51, 24 Feb 53, Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 26 Aug 46; see also Leeds South LA, Minutes, 3 Apr 51, 13 Apr 51, 6 Nov 51, 15 Feb 52 where the constituency LA appears to have taken over responsibility for candidate selection due to the collapse of ward LAs

⁵⁴⁴ Newbury LA, Minutes, 16 Nov 60, 1 Feb 61, 28 Jun 61

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 May 62, 4 Nov 64

select local government candidates after district LAs were set up.⁵⁴⁶ This could generate conflict between constituency and district LAs. A committee set up by the constituency LA (and including an independent councillor) was the mechanism for the selection of local government candidates in Hampstead in the late 1940s.⁵⁴⁷ The committee was inactive by 1951 and ward LAs were asked to find their own candidates but, when Adelaide Ward LA selected a candidate in 1952, the constituency LA resolved that all local government candidates in the borough should be centrally approved and there was further debate in 1953 about the role of ward LAs in fighting local government elections.⁵⁴⁸

One of the most sophisticated mechanisms for the selection of Liberal local government candidates, and the reselection of sitting councillors, during the 1945–64 period was that devised in Southend. Southend West LA had appointed a selection committee in 1958 which was to approve potential candidates before they were selected by ward LAs.⁵⁴⁹ Southend East LA was a weaker organisation and left all aspects of candidate selection to ward LAs, which caused problems when some candidates with questionable credentials were elected in 1962.⁵⁵⁰ Southend West LA proposed the formation of a selection committee covering the whole of the borough which began operating in August 1962. At the suggestion of Southend East LA, this was to interview sitting councillors.⁵⁵¹ If the joint

⁵⁴⁶ For instance Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 12 Jan 53, 21 Mar 53, 10 Jun 53, 9 Jan 56, 7 Jan 59, 14 Feb 61, 17 Jan 62, and Stockport LA, Minutes, 6 Mar 46, 6 Oct 47, 3 Nov 47 where the LA Executive Committee selected candidates for by-elections, also 26 Sep 46

⁵⁴⁷ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 30 Sep 47, 16 Sep 48, 15 Feb 49

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 Mar 51, 5 May 52, 5 Jun 52, 8 Jun 53

⁵⁴⁹ Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 May 58

⁵⁵⁰ Interviews, Tim Ray, Michael King, Jean Sargent; and see p283

⁵⁵¹ Southend West LA, Papers, letter from R. D. James to M. King, 21 Oct 62

committee was to consider that a sitting councillor was “illiberal”, had a “bad attitude”, or was “personally unsuitable”, he or she, and the chairman of the appropriate ward LA, were to be invited to discuss the matter with the relevant constituency LA.⁵⁵² What would happen next was not formally stated and the procedure was not used prior to 1964.

The establishment of ward Liberal organisations within branch LAs could cause considerable debate about the correct procedure for the selection of local election candidates. Bognor Regis Liberals had selected council candidates, either informally or by means of a selection sub-committee, without reference to the Chichester consistency LA until ward organisations were re-established in the town in the early 1960s.⁵⁵³ The branch LA resolved in November 1962 that it would continue to control candidate selection despite the creation of ward LAs, but North ward Liberals selected a candidate without reference to the branch, who was elected in 1963.⁵⁵⁴ A compromise was reached when the branch LA’s Executive Committee agreed that ward LAs with more than 100 members could select their own council candidates and wards were asked in May 1963 to select their candidates early for the 1964 local elections.⁵⁵⁵ The declining strength of ward LAs in Bognor Regis led to local government candidate selection again being centralised in 1964.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵² Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 62

⁵⁵³ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 26 Feb 49, 15 Mar 49, 11 Jan 60, 29 Feb 60, 17 Oct 60, 21 Nov 60, 28 Feb 62

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 Nov 62, 30 Jan 63, 6 Mar 63

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 Apr 63, 15 May 63

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 Sep 63, 2 Mar 64, 31 Mar 64, 20 Apr 64

On balance, therefore, it can be seen that local government candidate selection was not generally left entirely in the hands of officers of either the district or constituency LAs, as suggested in Fighting for Liberalism, although councillors or LA officers did occasionally pick candidates themselves.⁵⁵⁷ Disputes between district and constituency LAs were rare, primarily because it was recognised that district LAs had considerable autonomy in this area and because mechanisms to coordinate candidate selection, for instance by means of panels of approved candidates, were widely accepted. The coordination of other aspects of local electioneering will be considered below.

Election Finance

Local election contests could be run on a shoestring budget, as Table 14 shows.

⁵⁵⁷ For instance in Halifax, Interview, Maurice Jagger

Table 14: Expenditure on Local Elections by Littleborough LA 1950–64⁵⁵⁸

	Number of Liberal candidates	Number of Liberal victories	Total expenditure
1950	4	2	£66 8s 5d
1951	4	2	£63 8s 5d
1952	3	1	£37 3s 8d
1956	4	1	£40 9s 8d
1957	4	2	£44 17s 4d
1958	3	1	£40 14s 3d
1959	4	1	£51 15s 6d
1960	1	0	£24 1s 0d
1961	3	1	£46 4s 8d
1962	3	2	£69 4s 9d
1963	3	1	£61 3s 7d
1964	3	1	£64 6s 2d

Table 14 shows the total expenditure on the Liberal Party’s local election campaigns in Littleborough, except for photographs on election addresses which candidates were asked to supply themselves.⁵⁵⁹ The cost of Liberal local election campaigns in the town was low because wards were small. In 1959, for instance, the winning candidates in each of Littleborough’s four wards polled between 350 and 950 votes.⁵⁶⁰ Elsewhere, local election campaigns were often more expensive, although it was unusual for a district LA to spend more than £100 per annum on them.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁸ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 1 Jun 50, 10 May 51, 19 May 52, 4 Jun 56, 14 May 57, 26 May 58, 1 Jun 59, 2 May 60, 27 Jul 61, 14 Sep 61, 17 May 62, 22 Apr 63, 24 May 63, 25 May 64, and Papers, Expenditure on Local Elections 1950–64

⁵⁵⁹ Littleborough LA, Minutes, 12 Oct 61

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 Jun 59

⁵⁶¹ For comparisons see Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 26 Jun 61 (£46 expenditure), 1 May 62 (£100), 21 May 64 (£82), Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 45 (£117), Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 26 May 53 (£42), 12 May 58 (£79)

Littleborough LA was distinctive in that it planned to pay in full for its local election campaigns every year.⁵⁶² Elsewhere, candidates and more senior Liberal organisations were often called upon to provide funds for local election contests. In Bognor Regis, for instance, candidates were expected to pay at least a proportion of their expenses. After a protest by a candidate in 1949 it was resolved that the branch LA would pay all expenses in full, but a county council candidate for a by-election in November 1949 paid his election expenses in full and in 1959 it was minuted that the branch had no funds to pay for council elections.⁵⁶³ Candidates in Godstone were expected to pay one-half of their election expenses.⁵⁶⁴

Constituency LAs were sometimes willing to provide some money to help pay for local election expenses, although examples of divisional bodies paying in full are rare.⁵⁶⁵ Even where district LAs overspent on local election campaigns, help from more senior Liberal bodies was not always forthcoming. Leeds North Ward LA embarked upon a local election campaign expected to cost £80 with £6 in the bank in 1945. The campaign cost £107 12s 11d and the ward LA requested help from Leeds Liberal Federation to cover a £20 deficit.

⁵⁶² See also Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 6 Jun 56

⁵⁶³ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 13 Apr 49, 12 Sep 49, 24 Nov 49, 16 Apr 59, and see resolution of 30 Mar 60

⁵⁶⁴ Godstone LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 61, 19 Mar 61; see also Southport LA, Minutes, 11 Jan 45, and Stockport LA, Minutes, 6 Mar 46

⁵⁶⁵ Small contributions were made by Leeds South LA, Minutes, 20 Jun 52, 17 Jun 53, Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 62, 12 Jun 64, Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 2 Feb 46, Southport LA, Minutes, 13 Feb 52, 13 May 52, Surrey East LA, Minutes, 7 Feb 64, 21 Apr 64, Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 53 and Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 13 May 53, 14 Feb 61, Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 3 Feb 47, 29 Sep 47, 22 Jan 57, 26 Feb 57, 28 Jun 60, 13 Sep 60; request for grants were made to Hampstead LA, Minutes, 20 Oct 52; the constituency LA paid local election expenses in full in Leeds South LA, Minutes, 10 Jul 51 and Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 May 58

Assistance was not forthcoming and donations by local Liberals paid off the debt.⁵⁶⁶ Alternative sources of funding for local elections were not easy to find. Sheffield Heeley LA considered levying all its members to pay for local election contests in 1962 and the expenses incurred in fighting Leeds' Holbeck North ward in 1949 were paid by the trustees of Lincoln Villa, the former headquarters of the constituency LA.⁵⁶⁷ For the most part, however, district LAs were expected to finance local election campaigns and were not expected to fight local elections if they could not guarantee to pay the expenses incurred at the outset.

Coordination

Where Liberals regularly contested local government elections in different wards of the same borough, town or city, pressures built up for greater coordination of aspects of the Liberal Party's involvement in local government.⁵⁶⁸ Coordination for the purposes of candidate selection has already been discussed. City, constituency and district LAs also formed bodies to coordinate Liberal policy on local affairs, often leading to the preparation of local Liberal manifestos or at least a common portion of candidates' election

⁵⁶⁶ Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 4 Oct 45, 9 Nov 45, 26 Nov 45

⁵⁶⁷ Sheffield Heeley LA, Minutes, 13 Mar 62, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 17 Jan 49

⁵⁶⁸ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 2 Nov 59, Hampstead LA, Minutes, 19 May 53, Faversham LA, Minutes, 22 May 63, Surrey East LA, Minutes, 18 Apr 61

addresses,⁵⁶⁹ and election press and publicity.⁵⁷⁰ Such bodies sometimes attempted to coordinate policies and organisation between as well as within constituency LAs.⁵⁷¹

Efforts to coordinate the Liberal Party's local election activities were often successful. Liberal manifestos were issued in Edinburgh in the early 1960s, Leeds throughout the 1945–64 period and elsewhere.⁵⁷² Not all Liberals saw the need for coordination, however. Agreement on policy could not always be reached by the Liberals in Southend, common policies were not agreed by the ward LAs in Rugby before 1964, and Leicester Liberal Federation withstood demands from Knighton and Oadby LA for city-wide coordination of candidate selection and Liberal policy on local affairs.⁵⁷³ Philip Taylor, a Liberal borough council candidate in Chester, was led to declare in 1963 that “I have never seen a Liberal policy written down [and] I would like to see something laid down about what we intend to do”,⁵⁷⁴ and ward LAs in Croydon had not even agreed a standardised campaign colour, never mind a common line on local issues, by 1964.⁵⁷⁵ A suggestion by

⁵⁶⁹ For instance Hampstead LA, Minutes, 13 Jul 50, 16 Dec 52, 15 Apr 53, 29 Nov 54, 13 Dec 55, Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 23 Mar 62, 4 Jan 63, 15 May 63, 29 Oct 63, 2 Mar 64; Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 16 Jun 52, Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 13 Jul 45, 14 Aug 45, 4 Oct 45, Stockport LA, Local Election Sub-committee, Minutes, 26 Feb 46, and Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, Feb 57, 6 Mar 57

⁵⁷⁰ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 30 Jul 52, 15 Apr 53, and Surrey East LA, Minutes, 17 Jan 61 and Organisation Committee, Minutes, 17 May 63

⁵⁷¹ Enfield West LA, Minutes, 11 Apr 49, 9 Apr 51, 18 Feb 52, Enfield Herald, 16 Nov 62, Liberal News, 15 Dec 62 (all Enfield), Leeds South LA, Minutes, 28 Apr 42, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 1 May 51, 12 Jan 53, 19 Jul 55, 3 Oct 58, 15 Nov 61, 26 Sep 63, 30 Oct 63, 4 Nov 63, and Sheffield Heeley LA, Minutes, 7 Dec 62

⁵⁷² Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 30 Aug 45, 12 Apr 48, 9 Mar 49, 15 Apr 53, 17 Mar 54, 26 Mar 56, 20 Mar 62, 26 Mar 64; Liverpool Liberal Federation, Minutes, 13 Feb 63, 27 Nov 63, 25 Mar 64; Interviews, David Morrish (Exeter), Alan Thame (Feltham), Peter Howell Williams (Wallasey), J. G. Gray and Robert Smith (Edinburgh), Graham Oxley (Sheffield)

⁵⁷³ Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 Nov 62, Leicester South East LA, Minutes, 18 Jul 61, 9 Nov 61, and Interview, Derek Gee

⁵⁷⁴ Chester Observer, 11 May 63

⁵⁷⁵ Croydon Liberal Papers

the Liberal agent in Surrey East that he should coordinate all of the 1964 local election contests in the constituency was initially received without comment, but, as the spring elections approached, branch LAs increasingly declared that they would organise the elections themselves without central coordination.⁵⁷⁶ Walthamstow Liberal Council evolved in the early 1960s into a body primarily concerned with developing Liberal policy on local issues but activists in the east of the borough repeatedly blocked efforts to devise a borough-wide Liberal programme.⁵⁷⁷ Manchester's Liberal councillors resolved in 1964 that "the time when we could afford the luxury of candidates whose policy differed substantially and materially from that of the Party and of the [Manchester Liberal] Federation is over".⁵⁷⁸

Another problem with the coordination of Liberal policy in local elections was that it might be seen to impose a form of group discipline on Liberal councillors or imply that Liberal councillors were bound to follow a line dictated by the LA Executive Committee. The organisation of Liberal council groups during the period from 1945 to 1964 will be discussed in a later Chapter,⁵⁷⁹ but the relationship between Liberal councillors and the executive committees of LAs differed from place to place. In most places, the relationship between Liberal councillors and LAs was modelled on that between Liberal MPs and the LPO. Councillors were not answerable to LAs and were not expected to discuss the line they would take in the council chamber with LA officials. This relationship was expressed

⁵⁷⁶ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 19 Nov 63, 10 Dec 63, 7 Feb 64, and see 20 Oct 64; a similar proposal had been twice discussed by the Organisation Committee, Minutes, 1 May 61, 21 May 62, but had not even reached the Executive Committee

⁵⁷⁷ Walthamstow Liberal Council, Minutes, 14 Jan 55, 5 Jan 60, 7 Jul 62, 3 Apr 63

⁵⁷⁸ Manchester Liberal Federation, Liberal Council Group, Minutes, 4 Nov 64

⁵⁷⁹ See p318

by a Mr Hayward, contesting a borough council election in Enfield in 1952, who told the electors that “I have [the LA’s] assurance that should I be elected they will in no way attempt to influence any decision I may take on your behalf as a councillor”.⁵⁸⁰ In some places, however, Liberal councillors were expected to report back to the LA Executive Committee. In Bognor Regis the district LA’s Policy Sub-committee was the forum in which the policies of Liberal councillors was determined,⁵⁸¹ and the Executive Committee of Southport LA was invited to participate in the group meetings of the town’s Liberal councillors in 1950.⁵⁸² A former Liberal councillor in Shrewsbury remembered a lively partnership between the Liberal group on the borough council and the LA’s Executive Committee.⁵⁸³ Constituency LAs would sometimes seek to admonish Liberal councillors for the opinions they expressed in council meetings, including, for instance, the Liberal member of Caterham and Warlingham UDC who voted against opening council meetings to the public.⁵⁸⁴

Conclusion

This survey shows that the guidance offered by the LPO on the constitution and purpose of district LAs did not adequately reflect the diverse nature of such bodies and nor did the

⁵⁸⁰ Enfield West LA, Papers, election addresses, Chester Chronicle, 2 Jun 62, and Interview, Derek Gee. Also Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 4 Jun 63 for the statement by Halton ward candidate Bernard Freeman: “I will not be led, coaxed or bribed by any person, or any group. The only two powers I heed are, first my GOD; secondly my conscience; and if I am elected I will write, speak and vote as my conscience dictates”

⁵⁸¹ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 2 Mar 64, 26 Oct 64, and Littleborough LA, Minutes, 2 Feb 53

⁵⁸² Southport LA, Minutes, 11 Jul 50, 4 Sep 50, 26 May 52

⁵⁸³ Interview, Alan Laurie

⁵⁸⁴ Surrey East LA, Minutes, 17 Oct 61

changes in the LPO's guidance reflect or determine changes in the ways in which district LAs operated. Some district LAs were simply the means by which canvassing, subscription collection and small-scale social events were organised by constituency LAs, as suggested by Fighting for Liberalism. Others were the basic units of Liberal organisation, operating with considerable autonomy, particularly in relation to local government, and holding the key to the financial well-being of constituency LAs.

It is vital to understand the role of district LAs in the Liberal Party in order to explain how the Liberal Party survived after the 1950 general election. As constituency LAs became moribund or struggled to hold together, the Liberal Party maintained an organised presence in some areas, such as Helensburgh, Littleborough and Bognor Regis, because of strong district LAs. The constitutional flexibility of the Liberal Party enabled district LAs to organise themselves and fight local elections even where constituency LAs were entirely absent, for example in Kearsley. In this sense, district LAs could be the Liberal Party's key unit of organisation. The weakness of the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period is sometimes overstated because it is often measured in terms of the number of constituency LAs affiliating to the LPO. District LAs played an important role in maintaining the Liberal Party's presence in a number of constituencies in which there was no LA affiliated to the LPO, flying the Liberal flag during the leanest years and assisting the re-formation and growth of constituency LAs during the years of Liberal revival.

IV. The Young Liberals

Introduction

The youth sections of the two major political parties were of limited significance during the 1945–64 period. The Young Conservatives were well-organised, claiming 170,000 members and over 2,000 branches at the organisation's peak in 1951.⁵⁸⁵ Their political activity was limited, however, minimising their impact on the Conservative Party as a whole.⁵⁸⁶ Young Conservative branches concentrated on raising money by holding social events rather than on political debate or campaigning, earning the movement the reputation of being “the best marriage bureau in the country”.⁵⁸⁷ The Young Conservatives' national conference was managed by the senior party organisation in order to avoid political embarrassment, particularly in the run-up to the 1964 general election.⁵⁸⁸

Labour's youth and student organisations were usually under the control of far left groups which kept them in a state of permanent confrontation with the senior party.⁵⁸⁹ The Labour League of Youth, established shortly after the Second World War, was closed down in

⁵⁸⁵ J. Holroyd-Doveton, Young Conservatives (Pentland Press, 1996) pp37–8 and J. D. Hoffman, The Conservative Party in Opposition 1945–51 (MacGibbon & Kee, 1964) p118

⁵⁸⁶ See Holroyd-Doveton, Young Conservatives, pp1–7, especially comments by E. Chalker and N. Scott on p6

⁵⁸⁷ P. Abrams and A. Little, “The Young Activist in British Politics” (British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16, 1965) p316

⁵⁸⁸ Holroyd-Doveton, Young Conservatives, pp216–7 and Abrams and Little, “The Young Activist in British Politics”, pp318–9

⁵⁸⁹ R. Protz, “Young Socialists” (New Outlook, No. 31, May 64) pp12–15 and F. Wright, “Socialist Youth and Student Organisations” (New Outlook, No. 72, July–August 68) pp30–2

1955. Its successor, the Young Socialists, was formed in 1960 but within five years had to be refounded after the “Keep Left” group took control of its Executive Committee. At that time, it was estimated that there were 25,000 Young Socialist members and 720 branches of the organisation.⁵⁹⁰ Labour’s Youth Officer was employed to prevent party funds from being used to promote views which ran contrary to established party policy. This exacerbated the tensions between the youth organisations and the senior party, resulting in the regular disintegration of Labour’s youth movement.

In contrast, the Young Liberals were an important force within the Liberal Party before 1964. As well as attracting recruits and raising money for the Party, they had a significant impact on the Party’s policy, strategy and organisation. Whereas the Young Liberals of the late 1960s and 1970s have been the subject of much comment and analysis,⁵⁹¹ the importance of the role played by the YLs during the 1945–64 period has tended to be overlooked. This Chapter assesses the strength and significance of the Young Liberals between 1945 and 1964, focusing on the activities of five organisations: the National League of Young Liberals (NLYL) and the Union of University Liberal Students (UULS), both of which were in existence throughout the 1945–64 period; Radical Action, which existed from 1941 to 1948; the Radical Reform Group, which was established in 1952; and the New Orbits which originated from a joint NLYL/UULS committee founded in 1957.

⁵⁹⁰ Abrams and Little, “The Young Activist in British Politics”, p316

⁵⁹¹ For example, R. Fox, “The Young Liberals 1970–79: Their Identity and Political Activities”, (unpublished MA thesis, Leeds University, 1995)

The National League of Young Liberals⁵⁹²

The organisation of the NLYL mirrored that of the senior party, with district and constituency Young Liberal associations (YLAs), area YL federations, and national YL institutions including an annual Assembly. Prior to 1946, the NLYL was described as a standing committee of the Liberal Party which operated with complete autonomy from the senior party. The Party's Reconstruction Committee recommended that the NLYL be more closely integrated into the senior party and, in return, proposed that the LPO should provide the NLYL with its own paid secretary.⁵⁹³ Between 1947 and 1960 the NLYL's grant from the LPO varied from nothing, in 1954, to £724 in 1948.⁵⁹⁴ The NLYL's grant was one of the first items of expenditure to be cut by the LPO in times of financial crisis and the organisation was not usually able to employ full-time staff as the Reconstruction Committee had intended. Chris Lakin was appointed in 1960 as the Party's first Youth Officer since 1929,⁵⁹⁵ but on his resignation in 1963 the LPO Executive Committee decided that it could not afford to appoint a permanent successor and a series of temporary part-time staff filled the breach.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹² The NLYL covered England and Wales. Its sister organisation, the Scottish League of Young Liberals (SLYL) operated north of the border and had a similar relationship with the SLP as the NLYL did with the Liberal Party Organisation. The SYL was a weak organisation which was disbanded from 1954–7. In the mid-1960s Inverness LA was the largest Liberal organisation in Scotland but there does not seem to have been a complementary Inverness Young Liberal Association at that time. See Inverness LA, Minutes, 5 Sep 57. Also, Interview, T. R. L. Fraser

⁵⁹³ "Coats off for the Future!", paragraphs 132–34, 186, pp27, 36

⁵⁹⁴ Sommer, "Organisation of the Liberal Party", p99

⁵⁹⁵ Abrams and Little, "The Young Activist in British Politics", p324

⁵⁹⁶ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 30 Mar 63, 24 May 63, 22 Jun 63, 23 Nov 63, and Organisation Committee, Minutes, 27 May 63, 8 Jul 63, 25 Nov 63

Even after 1946, the Liberal Party's constitution continued to uphold the autonomy of the NLYL from the senior party. Evidence of conflict between YLAs and senior Liberal organisations is scarce, however. Southend YLA disputed its exclusion from a selection committee for local election candidates, formed in 1962, and there were regular complaints from the YLs that the senior association did nothing to guide their activities, and from the senior association that they were not kept aware of the YLs' activities and strength.⁵⁹⁷ The Manchester Regional Young Liberals operated at arm's-length from both the North West and Manchester Liberal Federations.⁵⁹⁸ Senior Manchester YLs suspected that the North West Federation's secretary, Neville Stanton, was unhappy that the YL organisation had usurped the Federation's role by concentrating on reviving derelict LAs and encouraging local election contests, and there was some criticism of the YLs by the Manchester Federation for the same reason.⁵⁹⁹ A gulf existed between Newcastle-upon-Tyne YLs and the city's senior Liberals in the early 1960s, particularly when the YLs began contesting local elections and resisted efforts by the senior LA to vet prospective Liberal candidates.⁶⁰⁰

Far from complaining that the senior party interfered with the organisation or policy making of the NLYL, YLs often argued in favour of greater support from the LPO for YL

⁵⁹⁷ Southend West LA, Minutes, 13 Jul 62, 11 Jan 63, 3 Mar 64, Southend Constituencies' Joint Selection Committee, Papers, 1962–4, and Southend YLA, Minutes, 20 Feb 63

⁵⁹⁸ For example, North West Liberal Federation, General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 14 May 63, regarding lack of coordination between the senior and Young Liberal federations

⁵⁹⁹ Manchester Liberal Federation, Minutes, 13 Oct 59; Interview, Denis Wrigley

⁶⁰⁰ Interview, Chris Foote Wood

activities, and the senior party was usually keen to encourage the activities of Young Liberals without controlling or directing them.⁶⁰¹

There was a constitutional link between the NLYL and the senior party at the local level in that each member of a YLA was counted as a member of a Liberal association.⁶⁰² This sometimes permitted the senior organisation to exercise some influence or control over the YLs. Hampstead LA intervened in the financial affairs of the Hampstead YLs when the latter organisation incurred a £200 debt after arranging an over-ambitious social programme. At the same time, the YLs were banned from issuing press statements independently of the senior association.⁶⁰³ The LA refused to take responsibility for the debt, but instead arranged a scheme whereby the YLs could pay it off. It was more common for the senior association to take little interest in YL activities or to be entirely unaware of them.

It was estimated that there were 260 YLAs in 1961 and 310 one year later, although in only 50 constituencies was there more than one YLA, suggesting that district YLAs were difficult to establish.⁶⁰⁴ The vast majority of YLAs were English, with over half being located in the southern half of the country.⁶⁰⁵ It is difficult to estimate accurately the

⁶⁰¹ A. Bagnall, "The Young Ones" (New Outlook, No. 25, Nov 63) pp18–23

⁶⁰² Fighting for Liberalism, pp10–12. YLAs were described in this volume as Liberal Societies and it was recommended that they should be entitled to send delegates to the senior association's executive committee

⁶⁰³ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 12 Mar 48, 24 Mar 48, 1 Apr 48, 6 May 48, 3 Jun 48

⁶⁰⁴ "Call to Action Campaign", Liberal Party Forward Planning Committee, Report, Dec 61 and LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 27 Jan 62

⁶⁰⁵ D. Crawford, "A Look at the Liberal Party" (New Outlook, No. 19, May 63) p23. Crawford's estimates of the number of YLAs in the 1959–63 period are more generous than those considered at the same time by the LPO Executive Committee

membership of the NLYL during this period, especially as during the Call to Action campaign LAs were not asked to specify how many of their members were YLs. The NLYL’s estimates of its membership, which some have claimed were exaggerated, are provided in Table 15.⁶⁰⁶

Table 15: NLYL Membership

Year	NLYL membership
1957	below 5000 ⁶⁰⁷
1959	10,000
1962	15,000
late 1960s	12,000 ⁶⁰⁸

These estimates suggest that the NLYL’s membership followed the same trends as the senior party’s membership during the late 1950s and early 1960s, peaking in 1962 at the time of the Orpington by-election. Taken together with the Call for Action survey, these estimates suggest that each YL organisation had around 50 members in 1962. This tallies with the membership levels YL organisations reported to the press or to senior Liberal associations during this period, as Table 16 shows.

⁶⁰⁶ Interview, Roy Douglas; F. Ghiles, “The Young Liberals 1959–69”, (unpublished MA thesis, University of Keele, 1971) p40

⁶⁰⁷ Bagnall, “The Young Ones”, published this and the subsequent two estimates

⁶⁰⁸ Fox, “The Young Liberals 1970–79”, p2

Table 16: Local YL Membership 1957–64

YL organisation	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Southend (2 seats) ⁶⁰⁹	-	-	18	43	120	-	-	-
Cradley ⁶¹⁰	70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enfield (2 seats) ⁶¹¹	-	-	-	-	-	>100	-	-
Banbury ⁶¹²	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30

Membership figures reported before this date also suggest that the NLYL’s estimates of its membership were broadly accurate. YL groups required at least 20 members to be viable organisations and constituency or district YLAs rarely exceeded 100 members during the 1945–64 period.⁶¹³

Fox suggested that the NLYL’s membership figures were understated because many YL groups failed to affiliate to the national body, a factor illustrated by table 17.⁶¹⁴

Table 17: Membership of the London League of Young Liberals⁶¹⁵

	1959	1961	1962
Affiliated membership	330	440	800
Estimated total membership	900	not known	1,400

⁶⁰⁹ Southend YLA, Minutes, 10 Mar 59, 29 Nov 60, 15 Sep 61

⁶¹⁰ Oldbury Weekly News, 15 Nov 57. Cradley YLA was the major component of Oldbury and Halesowen divisional YLA

⁶¹¹ The Enfield Liberal, May 62

⁶¹² Banbury Guardian, 20 Apr 64

⁶¹³ Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 6 Nov 50 details the failed attempt to set up a YL branch based around eight youths. South Leeds LA, Minutes, 25 Jul 49 describes an active YL branch with twenty members

⁶¹⁴ Fox, “The Young Liberals 1970–79”, pp2–3

⁶¹⁵ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 19 Feb 59, 17 Dec 59, 4 Mar 63

Given that the London League of Young Liberals was one of the largest components of the NLYL, Table 17 suggests that the membership of affiliated YLAs was between one-third and two-thirds of the total NLYL membership.

Table 18: Variability of YL Membership

YL organisation	Aug 1962	Oct 1962	Dec 1962	Jun 1963
Helensburgh ⁶¹⁶	28	37	28	22

Table 18 shows that YLAs suffered from a rapid turnover of membership. The average length of YL membership tended to be short because members went up to university, moved around the country for career reasons or were called up for national service during their late teens and early twenties. YL groups tended to become inactive as key members left their local districts for these reasons, until new leaders and opinion-formers were recruited.

Union of University Liberal Societies

The UULS comprised members of university Liberal Clubs and, like the NLYL, it was a recognised unit of the Liberal Party, ensuring its autonomy from the LPO and the party leadership. As with the NLYL, the Reconstruction Committee recommended in 1946 that the UULS should have its own paid secretary based at the Liberal Party’s headquarters, but again this generally proved impossible to deliver for financial reasons.⁶¹⁷ The UULS received even less funding from the LPO than the NLYL, just £15 in 1947, and then

⁶¹⁶ Dunbartonshire West LA, Minutes, 8 Aug 62, 8 Oct 62, 17 Dec 62, 17 Jun 63

⁶¹⁷ “Coats off for the Future!”, paragraphs 127–8, p26

nothing until a grant of £150 in 1953, and from 1955 it shared grants with the NLYL which fluctuated erratically from year to year.⁶¹⁸ The UULS had its own Executive Committee and Council, mirroring the institutional structure of the LPO, and held an annual policy-making Assembly. The organisation produced its own newsletters, variously known as the University Guardian, Ahead and Scaffold.

The relationship between individual university Liberal clubs and local Liberal associations varied across the country. The Exeter University Liberals were represented on the Executive Committee of Exeter LA and played an active part in local politics.⁶¹⁹ Oxford University Liberals were often involved in local election campaigns, particularly in east Oxford in the early 1960s.⁶²⁰ A graduate student was elected as a Liberal councillor in Cambridge in 1962, although there had not been a tradition of CULC involvement in local politics before then.⁶²¹ Other university Liberals had little or no contact with the LAs of the towns and cities in which they were resident.

The membership of UULS was thought to be 4,500 in 1961.⁶²² The organisation was dominated by a small number of universities, particularly Oxford, Cambridge and London.⁶²³ The membership of the university Liberal clubs was subject to the same

⁶¹⁸ Sommer, "Organisation of the Liberal Party", p99

⁶¹⁹ Interview, David Morrish

⁶²⁰ Interviews, Paul Tyler, Sarah Curtis and Honor Balfour

⁶²¹ Interview, Michael Steed

⁶²² "Call to Action Campaign", Report, p4

⁶²³ Motions and amendments at the 1947 UULS Assembly were proposed by delegates from just five universities, the three mentioned plus Glasgow and Bristol. Durham University Liberal Club claimed a membership of just nine in 1962 — see C. Wood, "Around the Universities" (Scaffold, Vol. 3, No. 5, Mar 1963) p12

fluctuations as affected YLAs. Table 19 shows the changing membership of Oxford University Liberal Club and of the University of London Liberal Federation.

Table 19: University Liberal Clubs’ Memberships 1946–67⁶²⁴

Membership, Michaelmas Term	1946	1947	1951	1956	1957	1958	1961	1967
ULLF	-	-	-	250	300	300	-	-
OULC	327	644	1,175	-	-	-	400	1,000

Relationship between the NLYL and UULS

The relationship between the NLYL and UULS was generally harmonious throughout the 1945–64 period. The two organisations were complementary and efforts were made to ensure that UULS members joined their local YLA after graduation. Several senior UULS members did become senior figures in the NLYL,⁶²⁵ but many moved straight into senior Liberal associations or became parliamentary candidates.⁶²⁶ One source of tension between the organisations arose from the suspicion that senior Liberals held UULS in higher regard than the NLYL, not least because UULS had more seats on the LPO Council than the NLYL, which was the larger body.⁶²⁷ UULS members regarded their organisation as more cerebral and more internationalist in outlook than the parochial, constituency based,

⁶²⁴ J. Rattue, Kissing Your Sister: A History of the Oxford University Liberal Club and its Successors 1913–93 (J. Rattue, 1993) for OULC data. London Liberal Party, Minutes, 18 Oct 56, 21 Nov 57, 16 Oct 58, for ULLF data

⁶²⁵ For example, John Baker

⁶²⁶ For example, Jeremy Thorpe

⁶²⁷ Constitution of the Liberal Party (LPO, 1962) p7. Ten representatives of the NLYL were entitled to sit on the party council, compared to fifteen representatives of UULS

NLYL.⁶²⁸ The differences between the NLYL and UULS were most apparent during the early 1950s when the NLYL prominently advocated free trade and the taxation of land values while a number of senior UULS members and former graduates supported the Radical Reform Group, which opposed such policies and which will be discussed below. Later in the decade the two organisations formed a joint political committee which became the New Orbits group, again to be discussed below. This reduced the scope for tension between the NLYL and UULS by diminishing the extent to which they could pursue separate political agendas.

Role and Influence of the NLYL and UULS

The first, main, function of the NLYL and UULS was to recruit young people into the Liberal Party. The senior party was not thought capable of recruiting young people because they required “more strenuous political and social activities than their seniors”.⁶²⁹ Secondly, they sought to strengthen LAs, both by raising funds and by campaigning. Thirdly, the two youth organisations were expected to bring liberalism to the attention of the young and provide the political education of young Liberals. The NLYL and UULS encouraged YLs to study contemporary political problems and present and debate proposed solutions; moreover, they encouraged them to become involved with and learn about political campaigning, helped them understand the Liberal Party’s organisation, and facilitated their transition into senior party organs.

⁶²⁸ Interviews, Barbara Joyce, Beth Graham, Derrick Mirfin, Michael Steed

⁶²⁹ Effective Organising, 1963, p9

The youth organisations’ membership figures do not suggest that these organisations were effective at bringing large numbers of young people into the Liberal Party. One or two youth organisations — notably the Liberal clubs at Oxford and Cambridge Universities — did recruit a mass membership, but most university Liberal clubs and YL organisations were very small and fought a continuous battle to remain in existence.

Table 20: The Background of Liberal Parliamentary Candidates 1945–64⁶³⁰

	1945		1950		1951		1955		1959		1964	
Experience	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Parliamentary contests	34	11.07	55	11.60	83	76.14	49	44.54	82	38.43	116	31.78
Local government	18	5.86	49	10.32	8	7.34	8	7.27	27	12.50	84	23.01
Constituency LAs and Liberal federations	12	3.91	115	24.20	31	26.45	26	23.64	58	26.84	77	21.10
LPO/LCA organisations	7	2.28	38	8.00	23	21.10	13	11.82	51	23.61	67	18.36
Family links to Liberal Party	8	2.61	21	4.42	4	3.67	4	3.64	2	0.93	4	1.10
Other political parties	5	1.63	16	3.36	5	4.58	2	1.82	3	1.37	7	1.91
NLYL/UULS	6	1.95	41	8.62	13	11.89	25	22.64	20	9.27	39	10.69
None	221	71.99	240	50.53	16	14.68	33	30.00	54	25.00	104	28.49
Other	2	0.65	12	2.53	9	8.26	7	6.36	14	6.48	24	6.58

Table 20 shows that the NLYL and UULS did play a significant role in recruiting the leadership of the Liberal Party, particularly potential parliamentary candidates. Abrams and Little concluded in 1965 that members of UULS in particular were “usually guaranteed the opportunity of becoming Liberal parliamentary candidates”.⁶³¹ Between one-tenth and one-

⁶³⁰ Table 20 is based on the biographical information given in *The House of Commons* (The Times) for each general election between 1945 and 1964. The proportion of candidates who were involved with the NLYL and UULS at some point in their political careers is probably understated because of the limited information provided in the volumes, particularly in the 1945 edition. Many candidates had experience of two, three or four of the roles listed in Table 20

⁶³¹ Abrams and Little, “The Young Activist in British Politics”, p327

quarter of Liberal general election candidates during the 1945–64 period had significant political experience in the NLYL and/or the UULS.

The ways in which senior LAs could influence the actions of YLAs have already been discussed. At its best, the relationship between LAs and YLAs was symbiotic and YLs were often successful in their aim of assisting senior organisations. LAs often came to depend upon YLs for funds and help at elections. Helensburgh YLA contributed £368 to Dunbartonshire West Liberal Association's 1964 general election fighting fund, the money having been raised through a series of profitable dances.⁶³² Cradley YLA raised £150 towards the renovation of the local Liberal club in 1959.⁶³³ It was typical for YLAs to take charge of a ward during general election campaigns and to be responsible for canvassing, leafleting and polling day activity. YLs were also frequently relied upon to provide workers during local election campaigns.⁶³⁴

The impact of UULS on LAs was usually felt through the operation of commando raids. These were short periods of intensive campaigning by students in order to help establish Liberal organisations in derelict constituencies, to assist local Liberal associations in contesting parliamentary by-elections, and to help strengthen existing Liberal organisations in promising constituencies.⁶³⁵ The effect of a commando raid on an individual constituency could be considerable. A tour of Chorley by the Cambridge University

⁶³² Dunbartonshire West LA, Minutes, 26 Feb 64. The constituency was not, however, contested by a Liberal in 1964

⁶³³ Oldbury Weekly News, 5 Mar 59

⁶³⁴ For example, London Liberal Party, Minutes, 19 Oct 50

⁶³⁵ "Coats Off for the Future!", appendix 3, pp48–9

Liberal Club in 1952 involved 400 man hours of campaigning. Over 2,000 houses were canvassed, 6,000 leaflets were distributed, and several formal and informal political meetings held.⁶³⁶

All but the largest YL organisations found it difficult to promote liberalism to the young. The Oxbridge Liberal clubs had the resources and membership to organise public meetings with major speakers but most small YLAs relied on mock parliaments, which sprang up after 1945 in many towns and cities, as one of the main means of propagating Liberal views outside of election periods. University Liberal club journals were useful vehicles for discussing and popularising Liberal policies, as were the publications of area YL organisations such the London Radical and the Manchester Regional Young Liberals' pamphlets Campaign Facts and Counterblast. Few other YL organisations possessed the resources to publish such material.

As will be seen below, Young Liberals were heavily involved in policy and strategy debates within the Liberal Party before 1964, but these mostly involved ginger groups rather than the two main youth organisations. One reason for this was that separate groups, such as New Orbits, could combine activists from both the NLYL and UULS. The other two groups, Radical Action and the Radical Reform Group, however, were set up by young parliamentary candidates and reflected the problems experienced by the NLYL in recruiting university graduates who moved straight from the UULS to the senior party. Young Liberals in some constituencies did have a significant influence on the Liberal Party's strategy, however. In Rugby, which will be the subject of a case study in Chapter

⁶³⁶ Chorley LA, Papers. One of the most novel examples of campaigning employed on this tour was the rendition of "Clement Davies' Warriors are marching to the fray" in Chorley Market Place

six,⁶³⁷ the YLA was instrumental in devising a strategy for contesting local elections which led to a revival of the Liberal Party in the town, the election of several Young Liberals to the borough council, and the development of new electioneering methods. The NLYL leadership, although occasionally including councillors, played no part in these developments, or similar initiatives elsewhere.⁶³⁸

Finally, the NLYL made a major contribution to the reform of the Liberal Party's organisation when a YL dominated committee, led by Timothy Joyce, pioneered reforms to the Liberal Assembly. The 1958 Liberal Assembly at Torquay was a shambles with the President, Sir Arthur Comyns Carr, failing to maintain order. The media coverage of the occasion was disastrous and reinforced the impression that the Liberal Party was a chaotic gathering of disparate independents. After the Joyce committee's recommendations had been implemented, the Liberal Assembly was better organised and more oriented towards attracting favourable media coverage.

Young Liberal Ginger Groups

On three occasions before 1964, organisations separate from the Liberal Party's formal structures were established to articulate particular strategic and policy ambitions. Each of these organisations was dominated by YLs, if not always led by them, and had significant effects on the policies and strategy of the Liberal Party.

⁶³⁷ See p276

⁶³⁸ For example, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Interview, Chris Foote Wood)

RADICAL ACTION⁶³⁹

Radical Action was set up on 19 July 1941 by a group of young Liberal candidates, attending that year's Liberal Assembly.⁶⁴⁰ The group's aim was to "activate and energise the Liberal Party both as regards policy and organisation".⁶⁴¹ The impetus for the establishment of Radical Action came from the refusal of the Liberal Party leadership, during the 1941 Assembly, to countenance a discussion of the electoral truce. Immediately at the outbreak of the Second World War all the political parties, including even the Communist Party, agreed not to contest parliamentary by-elections, but to allow the party whose MP had resigned, died or otherwise left the House, thus causing the vacancy, to nominate a successor. Similar agreements also existed to fill local council vacancies. Despite this agreement, a succession of independent challengers emerged to force elections mostly in Conservative-held seats. These independents revealed that a significant and expanding proportion of the electorate was not prepared to back the government when asked to do so.⁶⁴² A section of the Liberal Party was uneasy at the prospect of allowing the Munich-tainted Conservative Party to co-opt its supporters into Parliament for the duration of the war, and saw an opportunity for the Liberal Party to exploit the growing public dissatisfaction with the Conservatives. This section, led by Donald Johnson, Ivor Davies and Honor Balfour, formed Radical Action with the purpose of forcing a debate on the

⁶³⁹ Interview, Honor Balfour, provided much of the information in this section

⁶⁴⁰ The group was called the Liberal Action Group until 1943

⁶⁴¹ D. Johnson, Bars and Barricades (Christopher Johnson, 1952) p211

⁶⁴² These independents took an average 22.2 per cent of the poll between them in 1940 and 31.7 per cent in 1941

issue of the truce within the Liberal Party and possibly contesting by-elections as Liberal or Independent Liberal candidates.

Radical Action was not only concerned with strategic matters. During 1940 Johnson had contacted both the Liberal Party and the Ministry of Information to offer constructive suggestions about the way in which British propaganda could be improved and to propose policies which would ensure that fascism would not be able to take a fresh grip on post-war politics.⁶⁴³ Neither organisation was interested and consequently Johnson intended Radical Action to be the vehicle through which his views could be more effectively propagated. Throughout 1942 Radical Action debated the views expounded by Johnson and two Liberal MPs, Sir Richard Acland and Tom Horabin.⁶⁴⁴ All three were concerned with the question of how to prevent the re-emergence of mass unemployment, gross inequalities of income and fascism at the end of the war. The Beveridge Report, published in November 1942, provided a focus for Radical Action's attention. The mutual suspicion with which Radical Action and the Liberal leadership regarded each other was intensified by the refusal of the latter to vote in the House of Commons for the immediate implementation of the Beveridge Plan, in February 1943.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ Johnson's views are set out under the pseudonym Odysseus, Safer Than a Known Way (Johnathan Cape, 1941)

⁶⁴⁴ Sir Richard Acland, What it Will be Like in the New Britain (Victor Gollancz, 1942) and T. Horabin, Politics Made Plain (Penguin, 1944)

⁶⁴⁵ Nine Liberal MPs supported the critical left-wing amendment, Clement Davies and George Grey speaking to it during the three-day debate in the House. Six Liberals voted with the Government, H.G. White speaking to the official Liberal line. Spicer later wrote of the Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, that "Sinclair should have resigned on the third day of the Beveridge Report debate" — Balfour Papers, memorandum entitled "Political Reflections", 26–27 Mar 44

Radical Action was an élite group, with a membership of around 100. Six sitting Liberal MPs were connected with the group, and another 48 group members stood as Liberals in post-war general elections, 40 of them in 1945.⁶⁴⁶ A number of senior Radical Action members had been involved with the NLYL and UULS before or during the war, including Honor Balfour, George Grey, briefly MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed, and Frances Josephy, several times a Liberal parliamentary candidate. Radical Action was not solely a youth organisation, and it attracted support and encouragement from older Liberals, but it was dominated by YLs, especially those with an Oxbridge background.

The initial aims of Radical Action were subtly changed by the influx of new members into the group.⁶⁴⁷ Radical Action did not support a motion brought by Johnson to the 1942 Liberal Assembly opposing the truce and, as a consequence, Johnson was replaced by Lancelot Spicer as the group's chairman. Individual Radical Action members, particularly Johnson, Davies and Balfour, subsequently campaigned against government candidates in by-elections but the group as a whole turned its attention towards achieving three strategic, policy and organisational objectives.

On the question of the Party's strategy, Spicer understood that if the Liberal Party formally broke the electoral truce then the Liberal Ministers would have to leave the government. Sinclair was clearly not prepared to take this step and Radical Action therefore pressed him

⁶⁴⁶ The MPs were Clement Davies, Tom Horabin, Lady Megan Lloyd George, Edgar Granville, Wilfrid Roberts and Professor William Gruffydd. Sir Richard Acland, who split from the Liberal Party in 1942 to form Common Wealth, was also connected with the group for a short time, as was George Grey who was killed in action in 1944

⁶⁴⁷ The initial membership of the group was 27, but this was expanded to 50 in November 1941 and 100 in September 1942. Balfour Papers, memoranda entitled "Resolutions passed by Liberal Action Group at various meetings", 23 Nov 41, resolution number 3, and "Liberal Action Group memorandum", 8 Sep 42

to define his attitude towards the continuance of the coalition government after the end of the war. Sinclair suggested that political conditions could be dangerous after the war, with a resurgence of Communism and an outbreak of right-wing Conservatism.⁶⁴⁸ He suggested that the coalition ought to proceed until international peace, order, justice and commerce were all restored, a process which would take, “three years” rather than “three weeks”.⁶⁴⁹ This approach was reiterated by Sinclair at the 1943 Assembly and by some of his parliamentary colleagues.⁶⁵⁰ Radical Action was effective in achieving its aim of committing the Liberal leadership to fighting the impending general election as an independent organisation, free of coupons and pacts, and staying out of any subsequent coalition administration. The group’s success rested on the support their argument received from the party rank and file. Donald Johnson’s 1943 Assembly motion opposing the continuance of the coalition after the end of the war was passed and subsequently backed by the LPO Council. The North West Liberal Federation pressed the Liberal leadership to declare against a coupon election at the turn of 1944 and even debated a resolution calling for an end to the electoral truce, which had been passed by the West Cheshire Liberal Council.⁶⁵¹ The Yorkshire Federation was less sympathetic towards Radical Action, with Spicer facing some hostile questioning when he spoke to a meeting of its Executive Committee in January 1944.⁶⁵² That month, however, the Liberal candidates also backed

⁶⁴⁸ Balfour Papers, “Memorandum on lunch with Sinclair”, 16 Dec 42

⁶⁴⁹ “Speech by Sinclair at the National Liberal Club, 19 Mar 41”, LPO pamphlet

⁶⁵⁰ “The Party of Youth”, LPO pamphlet, Sinclair’s speech to the Liberal Assembly, 17 Jul 43. See also Balfour Papers, memorandum entitled “Radical Action and Liberal Survival”, Mar 44, for a critique of Harcourt Johnstone’s views on the coalition

⁶⁵¹ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 14 Jan 44, 18 Feb 44, 17 Mar 44

⁶⁵² Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 22 Jan 44

Radical Action's stance and in October the parliamentary party announced that the Liberal Party would contest the election independently with the maximum number of candidates.⁶⁵³

Radical Action also claimed success in its aim of encouraging the Liberal leadership to embrace the Beveridge Report and other radical social policies. Beveridge took a prominent part in the Liberal Party's election campaign in 1945 and most Liberal candidates made reference to his report and to the Party's commitment to fight want, ignorance, squalor and disease. Spicer felt that Radical Action had infused the Liberal Party with a militant, radical policy.⁶⁵⁴ Although Radical Action was outspoken in its support for Beveridge, there was little opposition within the Liberal Party to his ideas, and the constituency associations were as keen on the report as Radical Action.⁶⁵⁵ The Yorkshire Liberal Federation's Executive Committee debated a motion in July 1943 which attacked the Beveridge Report and described its author as a socialist, but the motion was heavily defeated and its originator, Ashley Mitchell, described as a Tory. Mitchell shortly afterwards resigned his position in the Federation.⁶⁵⁶ Radical Action just happened to be one unit amongst many in the Liberal Party supporting Beveridge at that time.

In its third aim, of reviving the party organisation, Radical Action was not successful. The formation of Radical Action reflected the frustration felt by many young candidates at the

⁶⁵³ P. Joyce, "The Liberal Party and the 1945 General Election" (Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter, supplement to No. 8, Sep 95) pp1-2

⁶⁵⁴ Balfour Papers, letter from L. Spicer to E. Hulton, 10 Nov 44

⁶⁵⁵ For example, see Scottish Liberal Federation, General Council, Minutes, 13 Sep 43, Altrincham and Sale LA, General Council, Minutes, 20 Apr 44 and Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 10 Apr 43

⁶⁵⁶ Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 22 May 43, 10 Jul 43

domination of the Liberal Party by an aristocratic, nepotistic, Asquithian élite.⁶⁵⁷ It was felt by group members that the Liberal Party was led by people who were socially and politically close to the Conservative Party and that seniority rather than merit determined the outcome of elections to the LPO Executive Committee and Council. Spicer suggested that Radical Action's immediate goal was to ensure that office holders and committee members throughout the Party were radical in outlook and active during the election.⁶⁵⁸ At the national level, the group submitted a slate of candidates to the elections of the LPO officerships in 1944, but all were unsuccessful in their challenge. Locally, Spicer claimed that "Radical Action as a unit and members of Radical Action individually are doing all they can to get constituencies active".⁶⁵⁹ Evidence given by wartime members of the Liberal Party and taken from Liberal association minutes has shown that most Liberals were either unaware of Radical Action or were suspicious of its agitation against the Liberal leadership.⁶⁶⁰ The group's local activism was restricted to the constituencies in which Radical Action members stood. These candidates suffered from at least the same deficiencies of organisation as other Liberal candidates across the country: the Liberal vote declined by an average of 3.85 per cent between 1935 and 1945 in the constituencies contested by Radical Action members for which comparisons can be made, compared to an average of 2.89 per cent for Liberal candidates as a whole.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁷ Johnson, Bars and Barricades, p217, Sir Percy Harris, Forty Years In and Out of Parliament (Andrew Melrose, [1947]) p151 and Balfour Papers, letter from S. Bonarjee to H. Balfour, 20 May 44

⁶⁵⁸ Balfour Papers, memorandum entitled "Liberals must lead a radical revival", Oct 44

⁶⁵⁹ Balfour Papers, letter from L. Spicer to W. Roberts, 18 Aug 44

⁶⁶⁰ Interviews, Lord Wigoder, Brian Ashmore, Nelia Penman and Joan Rickett. London Liberal Party, Minutes, 11 Mar 44

⁶⁶¹ Comparable constituencies are those in which there were three-cornered fights in 1935 and 1945 or straight fights between the Liberals and the same major party in both elections, excluding two-member and university seats

Although Radical Action continued to exist until 1948, its energies were largely spent after the 1945 election. The group had not swept the old guard out of the Liberal hierarchy, but had succeeded in pressing its primary strategic and policy aims on the leadership. Yet still the Liberal Party's decline continued. Radical Action acted as a safety valve, allowing young Liberal candidates a chance to influence the Liberal leadership at a time when the NLYL and UULS were virtually inoperative owing to the war. For a time Radical Action was made a recognised unit of the Liberal Party, giving it the same formal status as UULS. This prevented the organisation as a whole ceding from the Liberal Party to contest parliamentary by-elections. The group gave a first platform for a generation of future party leaders, including Philip Fothergill, Emrys Roberts, and Donald Wade. Radical Action's greatest success lay in encouraging Liberals such as these to challenge received wisdom within the Party at a time when such challenges were often construed as unpatriotic.

RADICAL REFORM GROUP⁶⁶²

The Radical Reform Group was established in 1953, again by a group of young Liberal candidates. There was no connection between the RRG and Radical Action.⁶⁶³ Nor was there a connection between the RRG and Lady Megan Lloyd George's radical group, the parliamentary remnant of Radical Action, which was engaged in talks with Labour Party MPs about a possible mass defection of radical Liberals to Labour in 1951.⁶⁶⁴ The actions

⁶⁶² This section is based on interviews with Lord Banks, Peter Grafton, Jeremy Thorpe, Derrick Mirfin, Roy Douglas and David Mills as well as the RRG pamphlets, Radical Aims (1954) and Radical Challenge (1960)

⁶⁶³ Honor Balfour was invited to join the group, but declined — Balfour Papers, letter from H. Balfour to P. Grafton, undated

⁶⁶⁴ The mass defection plan had been discussed by Radical Action after the 1945 election and continued to be raised until Lloyd George unilaterally moved to Labour in 1955, scuppering the plan. It had been hoped that the defection of several prominent Liberals to Labour would lead to a political realignment from which

of Lloyd George harmed the RRG and allowed its opponents to suggest that the group's members were also plotting to quit the Party. Although there were talks between RRG members and members of other parties the group did not seriously aim to leave the Liberal Party.⁶⁶⁵

The RRG was formed to counter the influence of the extreme free trade bloc within the Liberal Party. Although not large, this bloc was energetic and was backed by the financial resources of S. W. Alexander's City Press. The zeal and oratory of Alexander, Oliver Smedley, Roy Douglas and others led to the Liberal Assembly backing extreme free trade motions on several occasions. Smedley and his allies appealed to many ordinary Liberals to whom unilateral free trade, land taxation and laissez faire economics seemed both radical and a return to the Party's Gladstonian tradition. Other Liberals, especially parliamentary candidates, were less keen on single-issue demagoguery and were less sure that Smedley's vision was either realistic or desirable.

The RRG was small and London-based. Its members were mostly Liberal candidates from the 1950 election, including the former Liberal MP, A. J. F. MacDonald. Like Radical Action, the group was not led by YLs, but several prominent young Liberals were active in the group, including Jeremy Thorpe, Peter Bessell, Manuela Sykes, Richard Moore and Derrick Mirfin. It was noted above that during the early 1950s the NLYL and the UULS were led by strident free traders. The RRG provided an outlet for young Liberals such as Thorpe who wished to articulate an interpretation of liberalism different from Smedley's

a radical, non-socialist Labour Party would emerge as the only progressive challenger to the Conservative Party. Labour's rigid party discipline and trade union links stopped most radical Liberals from defecting

⁶⁶⁵ Liberal Forward, No. 271, Feb 57, p1, "misconceptions still exist about the purpose and function of the Group"

laissez faire approach. The RRG's activities were limited to organising conferences, providing a list of radical speakers for local associations and publishing occasional pamphlets.⁶⁶⁶ The RRG did not seek the formal status within the Party which Radical Action had once enjoyed and did not organise slates at Assembly. Instead it sought to alter the intellectual climate within the Liberal Party and to disperse the enthusiasm generated by the free traders.

The RRG's ambitions were strictly limited to reaffirming Liberal Party policy in the face of the laissez faire onslaught. The RRG's introductory pamphlet, Radical Aims, stated that "the understandable and healthy reaction against excessive state intervention might carry away with it those forms of state intervention which [the RRG] considered essential to the preservation of true freedom. In the absence of any clear guidance from the Liberal leadership in these issues, it seemed likely that the bulk of the Party might be manoeuvred by the active laissez faire exponents into increasing acceptance of their tenets".⁶⁶⁷ The RRG emphasised the desirability of government intervention in the economy to maintain full employment and social security, regulate trade and break up monopolies. The Smedleyites opposed industrial co-ownership, one of the Party's most distinctive policies, because it would have conflicted with a comprehensive land taxation scheme. The RRG believed co-ownership to be central to the Liberal Party's economic policies, and stated that "co-ownership is much more revolutionary and more satisfying to man's spirit than socialism".⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁶ Liberal Forward, No. 271, Feb 57, p1 and Hampstead LA, Minutes, 30 Jul 53

⁶⁶⁷ Radical Reform Group, Radical Aims (1954)

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

There was nothing new about the RRG's thinking.⁶⁶⁹ During the early and mid-1950s, Clement Davies offered the Liberal Party very little in the way of positive leadership. The NLYL and UULS filled that gap to some extent, by backing the laissez faire radicalism of Smedley and Douglas. The RRG argued the leadership's case, but such was the rudderless nature of the Party that a separate ginger group had to be established in order for the mainstream Liberal view to be presented to the Assembly. As Burton has observed, "in no sense were the members [of the RRG] prepared to take up anything approaching an outrageous stance in order to shock their elders".⁶⁷⁰ The RRG survived into the 1960s, and concentrated increasingly on international rather than economic questions in its later years. In 1960, the group called for the implementation of Nikita Khrushchev's disarmament plan and the establishment of an international security force, independent of national governments.⁶⁷¹ The group's decline mirrored the fresh grip taken on the Party by Jo Grimond, who encouraged new policy thinking and took a firm stand against the laissez faire economics of the Smedleyites. Although Grimond was not connected with the RRG he did keep in touch with Desmond Banks and with A. J. F. MacDonald.⁶⁷² RRG members including Banks, Moore and Mirfin were incorporated into the policy and organisational committees established by Grimond to run the Party. It can be said that the RRG succeeded in its aim of altering the Party's intellectual climate, although it is an open question whether the group affected Grimond's own views or whether he shared their concerns but was unable to speak out during his time as the Party's Chief Whip.

⁶⁶⁹ Liberal Forward, No. 271, Feb 57, p2. D. Banks argued that his definition of economic liberty was "substantially the same" as that offered in the Yellow Book (LPO, 1928)

⁶⁷⁰ M. E. Burton, "The Making of Liberal Party Policy 1945–80" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1983) p197

⁶⁷¹ Radical Reform Group, Radical Challenge (1960) pp3–4

⁶⁷² Grimond's Desk Diaries, 1952–64

NEW ORBITS

In 1957, a joint committee of the NLYL and UULS was formed to promote policy thinking in the wake of Grimond's accession to the Liberal leadership. The last major overhaul of Liberal policy had taken place during the Second World War, when a number of policy committees had been established by the LPO to consider post-war politics. The joint committee's aim was to update the Party's policies and put them together in one short document. The committee produced a pamphlet, New Orbits, which was ratified by a joint NLYL/UULS conference in Manchester in April 1959 and was well received within the Party as a whole. The committee continued in existence as the New Orbits group and began to accept subscriptions from YLs who wished to be kept up to date with its work and in 1961 the group became formally separate from its parent bodies, although both the NLYL and UULS were represented on the group's committee.⁶⁷³ The aim of the New Orbits group was to "act as a focal point for creative political work by younger Liberals throughout the country". It could draft policy motions for the NLYL or UULS, if asked, and produce policy documents independently.⁶⁷⁴

New Orbits was established as a separate political organisation because of the limited political impact of the NLYL and UULS at this time. The average age of the NLYL's membership was only just over nineteen and the political and social immaturity of YLAs tended to deter graduates from joining them.⁶⁷⁵ New Orbits gave twenty-something Liberals who wished to get involved with serious policy discussion an opportunity to

⁶⁷³ Ghiles, "The Young Liberals 1959–69", p2

⁶⁷⁴ Bagnall, "The Young Ones", p23

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

express themselves. This was especially appealing to young parliamentary candidates such as Barbara Burwell and Derrick Mirfin, and party employees such as Frank Ware and Alan Share. Through Share, New Orbits was kept in touch with the active Manchester Regional Young Liberal group. Timothy Joyce, who masterminded the Party's revised Assembly rules in 1958 and who conducted opinion polling for the Party, provided a link with the Liberal leadership.

New Orbits had three aims. Firstly, the group argued that the primary political struggle in the 25 years from 1958 would be between the Liberal and Labour Parties, to establish which Party would be in a position to initiate the next great reforming administration. New Orbits sought to devise the policies the Party needed to bring about a realignment of the left. The group emphasised a set of themes around which Liberal policy should be based — ownership for all, to redistribute wealth and power; social justice; personal liberty; internationalism, expressed through enthusiasm for the United Nations, the Common Market and nuclear disarmament; and the reform of government.⁶⁷⁶ The group emphasised the importance of the Liberal Party tackling bread and butter economic issues and made what was at the time a bold stand on nuclear disarmament. The group also proposed a range of social reforms which the NLYL and UULS found hard to stomach.⁶⁷⁷ Despite this, New Orbits was not an especially radical document. Its political impact stemmed from its novelty. As comprehensive a policy document as New Orbits had not emerged from the Liberal Party for many years.

⁶⁷⁶ New Orbits (Joint Political Committee of the NLYL and UULS, 1959) pp6–7 and High Time for Radicals (New Orbits Group, 1960) p16

⁶⁷⁷ The NLYL/UULS Manchester conference rejected the group's proposals to permit divorce by consent and to abolish the Lord Chamberlain's office, thereby ending the censorship of the theatre

The original New Orbits pamphlet was followed by a succession of policy studies into individual topics. The most successful of these was Five Year Plan, by Frank Ware, which formed the basis of a policy motion passed by the Liberal Assembly in 1961, thus becoming official Party policy.⁶⁷⁸ By this time, the group had turned its attention to strategic issues. Following the 1959 general election, New Orbits argued that Britain needed “a radical force as the principal opposition with every prospect of becoming the next government”.⁶⁷⁹ Neither the Liberal nor the Labour Party could provide this force, it was argued, because the Liberal Party’s organisation was too weak and Labour was tied to dated socialist dogma and the trade unions. The new radical force could emerge from the Liberal Party, however, if the Party targeted Labour voters and Labour seats and also undertook joint campaigns with Labour on radical issues, such as the future of the Central African Federation. In this way, the group concluded, the Liberal Party could aim to win between twelve and twenty seats at the next general election and, assuming Labour lost again, would be well-placed to overtake Labour as the most vigorous opposition to the Conservatives. New Orbits thus backed Grimond’s call for a realignment of the left in British politics, but went further in specifying how the Liberals could help achieve this aim and in advocating electoral deals with Labour when and where appropriate.⁶⁸⁰

The third aim of New Orbits was to improve the way in which the Liberal Party put itself forward. One of the reasons why New Orbits made a significant impression on the Liberal Party when it was published was its presentation. David Ives and Barbara Burwell were responsible for giving the booklet a glossy cover with a striking globe design on the front,

⁶⁷⁸ F. Ware, Five Year Plan (New Orbits, 1961)

⁶⁷⁹ High Time for Radicals, p3

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., pp12–22. Also p24, “personal contact between radicals in all parties is highly desirable”

and for using a modern typeface. Liberal Party literature prior to New Orbits was typically presented in an old fashioned manner, seemingly unchanged since the turn of the century. Policy booklets tended to be flimsy and devoid of illustrations. Following New Orbits the presentation of Party literature was revolutionised, with cartoons, diagrams, logos and slogans suddenly proliferating.

The New Orbits group also proposed to alter the Liberal Party's organisation to improve its public image. The group recommended a smaller executive committee, which would exercise more immediate and direct control over the Party than the LPO machinery could effect. The group also suggested that the national party should take a tighter group of candidate selection to ensure that only constituencies in which there was a viable Liberal organisation would contest parliamentary elections.⁶⁸¹ New Orbits envisaged a centralised and decisive Liberal leadership driving the Party towards realignment.

New Orbits was the most successful of the three YL ginger groups during the 1945–64 period. In terms of the presentation of policy documents, and several of the specific policy proposals made by the group, the Liberal Party took its lead from New Orbits. The group's stand on the reorganisation of the party machine was close to Grimond's own position. Grimond allowed the committee formed to oversee the 1959 general election campaign to continue as the Standing, and later the Organisation, Committee which effectively ran the LPO between 1959 and 1964. New Orbits also inspired Grimond to set up teams of policy experts, concentrating on particular subject areas where Liberal policy was outdated. Eight policy reports were issued in 1962 which formed the basis of Liberal policy for the rest of

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., pp23–4

the decade and New Orbits members were prominent members of the committees responsible for these documents. The group was also innovative in thinking through what was involved in a realignment of the left. Although New Orbits continued into the early 1970s,⁶⁸² its influence within the Liberal Party after 1964 was minimal, perhaps reflecting the group's own prediction in 1961 that "if Labour win [the next election] radical prospects will be put back by a generation".⁶⁸³

Conclusion

The NLYL and UULS did not cater fully for the needs of young Liberals, and especially for the needs of Liberals in their twenties and thirties who wished to "get on" in the party. Twenty-something Liberals did not always become involved with the NLYL. The Liberal Party was so short of members, and so dependent upon the energy and ideas which were provided by youth, that young Liberals were incorporated into the senior party machinery at a very young age. LAs sometimes did not establish YL branches because it was felt that this development would dilute the strength of local liberalism. More often, it was young Liberals who were responsible for local activism in the constituencies and especially for involvement in local government.⁶⁸⁴ The formation of ginger groups dominated by young Liberals suggests that frustration existed before 1964 with the direction of the Liberal Party. Radical Action, the Radical Reform Group and New Orbits all concentrated on the same targets — the conservatism of Liberal policy; the confused nature of the Party's

⁶⁸² Fox, "The Young Liberals 1970–79", p2

⁶⁸³ New Orbits, High Time for Radicals, p19

⁶⁸⁴ Bagnall, "The Young Ones", p23: "the bulk of the 'missing twenties' are devoting their energies to fighting local elections"

strategy; and the decrepitude of the LPO machinery. Although each organisation was concerned primarily with the challenges posed by the particular political circumstances of the day, the same themes emerge when each group is studied. Each aimed to radicalise the Party's policy, even if, in practice, radicalisation consisted solely of producing a comprehensive policy statement. Both Radical Action and New Orbits were also concerned with thinking through the Liberal Party's strategic options and with the ways in which the leadership of the party could be improved. The Radical Reform Group may well have evolved to consider these questions also, had it not been for the activities of Megan Lloyd George's radical group, which aroused suspicion about the true aims of the RRG.

The frequent development of Young Liberal ginger groups highlights the ways in which the NLYL and UULS was unable to accommodate the full spectrum of YL opinion. YLAs and university Liberal clubs were too transient to be able to provide the firm political base needed by YLs interested in taking a serious interest in liberalism. University Liberal clubs met for only half of the year, and were often too engrossed in Student Union politics or in the minutiae of speaker meetings, inter-party debates and commando raids to be able to make a significant contribution to the Liberal Party as a whole. Allied to this, students had only three or four turbulent years to become involved with their university Liberal club before they moved on. YLAs depended for their existence on the organisational abilities of a small number of activists. The demands of university, National Service and job mobility ensured that YLAs often flourished for only a very short time, before the key activists moved on and the branch withered. Consequently, the average age of YLA members was low and university graduates, parliamentary candidates, and prospective local councillors took little interest in their activities.

It would also seem that the constitutional position of the NLYL discouraged its officers from confronting the senior Party's policies or strategic aims. The NLYL's autonomy was granted in the expectation that Young Liberals would reach similar conclusions to their senior colleagues when permitted to study political problems. The NLYL's leadership took this responsibility seriously. Only during the early 1950s, when Roy Douglas led the NLYL, did the YLs adopt a significantly different policy approach from the senior Party. Even then, it can hardly be said that the Party leadership was particularly opposed to Douglas' ideas; the Party barely had a leadership at that time. YLs who wished to challenge the Party orthodoxy were forced to do so outside of the formal Party organisation, by setting up splinter groups and expressing themselves via pamphlets, publicity in Liberal News, and speeches at the Liberal Assembly.

Radical Action, the RRG and New Orbits met with differing degrees of success in the pursuit of their aims. All were successful in the respect of publicising their views amongst the Party hierarchy and in advancing ambitious members into the leadership. Many of the Liberal Party's most important post-war leaders, both in Parliament and beyond, commenced their national political careers in one of the three ginger groups. In this respect, all three supplemented one of the main functions of the NLYL and UULS — recruitment of the party élite. Indeed, the vigorous nature of the Party's youth structures helped achieve one of Radical Action's main aims — the dilution of the nepotistic nature of the Party leadership.

The Liberal Party was particularly unsuccessful at attracting young voters during the early 1960s, despite hopes that it could become the Party of youth.⁶⁸⁵ British Election Studies data has shown that the proportions of people under the age of 25 strongly identifying with the Liberal Party or expressing an intention to vote Liberal were lower than the average for the electorate as a whole in 1963 and 1964.⁶⁸⁶ There were signs by the mid-1960s, however, that more young political activists were being drawn to the Liberals than to the other political parties. Abrams and Little wrote in 1965 that “the recent willingness of several thousand young people to work for the Liberal Party is the most striking aspect and the only distinctive aspect of the political participation of youth in contemporary Britain”.⁶⁸⁷

After 1964 the YLs became prominent for advocating and practising direct action, formulating a number of radical policies — for example on the Palestinian question — and clashes with the Liberal leadership. It might seem as though the YLs before 1964 were tame in comparison. In many ways, however, the YLs before 1964 were the Liberal Party’s radical wing. Various examples have been given of the ways in which the Young Liberals influenced the policy, strategy and organisation of the Liberal Party before 1964. Radical Action exerted pressure on the Party leadership to support full and immediate implementation of the Beveridge plan and to contest the post-war general election free from agreements with other parties, being particularly successful in achieving the latter aim; the Radical Reform Group achieved some success in preventing the Party fully

⁶⁸⁵ P. Abrams and A. Little, “The Young Voter in British Politics” (British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16, 1965) p99

⁶⁸⁶ I. Crewe, A. Fox and N. Day, The British Electorate 1963–92 (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p7

⁶⁸⁷ Abrams and Little, “The Young Activist in British Politics”, p325

embracing policies based on laissez-faire economics before Jo Grimond became Liberal leader; and the New Orbits group had considerable influence over the Liberal Party's policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the organisation of the LPO and the Assembly, and the strategy of the realignment of the left. For reasons that have been explained, the NLYL and the UULS were less successful, but the NLYL played a central role in the economic policy battles of the early and mid-1950s and YLAs could determine strategic questions in constituency LAs, particularly concerning local elections, as will be shown in Chapter Six. The one major difference between the YLs before and after 1964 was that YLs in the earlier period never questioned the fundamental principles of liberalism as did their successors.

V. Liberal Activists

Methodology

An assessment of the grass-roots organisation of the Liberal Party would be incomplete without reference to the people who founded and maintained local organisations. There are many difficulties associated with gathering and analysing data relating to political activists, particularly at a distance of more than 30 years. In particular, attention must be paid to the issues of from whom data is gathered, and how representative the sample is of Liberal Party members as a whole during the 1945–64 period; what objective data, as opposed to subjective opinions or reminiscences, can be gathered; and how that data can be meaningfully interpreted.

Despite these difficulties, data about Liberal supporters and activists has been gathered and used before. Rasmussen interviewed 63 Liberal parliamentary candidates from the 1944–59 period between September 1960 and June 1961. His purpose was to investigate the motivations of Liberal parliamentary candidates, in particular to explore why some stood time and again for election despite their chances of success being remote, building upon the study of Gabriel Almond into the social, economic and political characteristics of Communists.⁶⁸⁸ Cyr conducted a postal survey of Liberals who were on a central list of speakers for the Party in the mid-1970s, eliciting 104 responses. He did not report the results of the survey in any great detail, but drew on some of the written comments he

⁶⁸⁸ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp175–181; and G. Almond et al., The Appeals of Communism (Princeton University Press, 1954)

received in his chapters on the Liberal Party and class and community politics.⁶⁸⁹ Brier interviewed members of the executive committees of Liberal organisations in the Torrington constituency and elsewhere in the late 1960s in an attempt to differentiate between traditional and new Liberal supporters.⁶⁹⁰ Butler and Stokes have used the British Election Studies data to elicit information about those people who expressed support for the Liberal Party between 1959 and 1964, concentrating on the fluidity of that support and on the social, religious and family background of Liberal supporters.⁶⁹¹

The research undertaken for this thesis, key aspects of which are reported below, was a more comprehensive study of Liberal Party activists than any undertaken before. Table 21 outlines the backgrounds of the 142 Liberals interviewed in the course of that research.

Table 21: Background of Interviewees

Background of interviewees	Number
Member of Parliament	3
Parliamentary candidate	49
Parliamentary candidate and local councillor	7
Local councillor	24
Liberal or Young Liberal association activist	55
Liberal Party staff	4

Table 21 shows that a broader range of interviews was conducted in relation to this thesis than was conducted by Rasmussen. Whereas Rasmussen confined himself to parliamentary candidates, only 34.5 per cent of this sample stood for Parliament between 1945 and 1964. Two significant additional groups of Liberal activists were interviewed in the course of the

⁶⁸⁹ See Cyr, Liberal Politics, pp297–301 for details of the survey and Chapters 6 and 7 of his book

⁶⁹⁰ A. P. Brier, “A Study of Liberal Party Constituency Activity in the mid-1960s” (unpublished PhD thesis, Exeter University, 1967)

⁶⁹¹ Butler and Stokes, Political Change (1969) pp315–38 and (1974) pp55–65, 107–19, 156–81

research relating to this thesis. 31 Liberals who were local councillors between 1945 and 1964, including 24 who were not parliamentary candidates, were interviewed, as were 55 activists who did not hold elected office or stand for Parliament during that period. These ranged from constituency agents and prominent Young Liberals who later became councillors, parliamentary candidates or MPs, to branch and ward association officials who never sought election.⁶⁹²

The interviews conducted in relation to this thesis had a dual purpose. Firstly, they were used to explore the political careers of interviewees, in order to assess the strength and organisation of the Liberal Party in different parts of the country; the nature of Liberal election campaigns, particularly those relating to local government; and other issues, often specific to the subject of the interview. This aspect of the interviews influenced the conclusions reached throughout this thesis. Secondly, a number of questions were asked of almost all interviewees. These were intended to find out when, where, why and how interviewees had first become involved with the Liberal Party and to examine the opinions of interviewees on a range of issues, including traditional Liberal policies, such as proportional representation, newly developed Liberal policies, such as on the nuclear deterrent, and the qualities of Liberal leaders. The results of these questions are analysed in this Chapter. They expand upon Rasmussen's analysis of the motivations of Liberal activists by including Liberals who were not parliamentary candidates and shed light on the development of the Party during the 1945–64 period, particularly in relation to trends in recruitment. One of the main reasons for the survival of the Liberal Party after 1945 was that its local associations remained in being and recruited new activists to replace those

⁶⁹² A full list of interviewees and their backgrounds is given in the bibliography

who retired or died. This Chapter will identify the main reasons why new recruits were attracted to a Party in such a hopeless condition, thus illuminating an important aspect of the Party's survival. Patterns of, and reasons for, recruitment will also give indications of the features of the Party's revival.

Interviewees were asked specific questions about their political opinions in order to test the extent to which they agreed with Liberal Party policy; to examine Cyr's claim that a primary motivation for joining the Liberal Party was a hostility to vested interests such as trade unions; and to assess Liberal activists' views of the Labour and Conservative Parties. Some of the data gathered from interviews, particularly in relation to the religious and family backgrounds of Liberal members, can be compared with the Butler and Stokes findings with regard to Liberal supporters, thus permitting a comparison of Liberal activists and supporters, at least for the 1959–64 period.

Rasmussen, in explaining how his interview data was collected, quoted Almond's comments on the data he gathered in the course of his research:

It is quite clear ... that the data used in this study fail to fulfil the canons of the scientific method ... [but] it can be said of this study that while it makes no claims to statistical validity, it is based on the largest and most carefully selected body of empirical data so far collected on these aspects of the Communist problem. Not only are the findings based on substantial evidence, but the individual findings have a logical consistency and build up into a coherent theory ... When a large body of individual findings cohere in a meaningful system another kind of test of validity is satisfied. Thus this study is based upon evidence, and individual items of evidence fit together into a meaningful explanation of the phenomena with which we are concerned.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹³ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p180 from Almond et al., The Appeals of Communism, pp xii-xiii

Much the same could be said of the data presented below. It is, of necessity, biased towards those Liberal members from the 1945–64 period still alive between 1994 and 1999. Interviewees were not selected, but suggested, by each other and by librarians, archivists and active Liberal Democrats. The data is thus biased towards the people who tended to be recommended as candidates for interview — long-standing Liberal members who were active in the Liberal Democrats — and against Liberal members from the 1945–64 period who had drifted out of Liberal politics or who had never been particularly active in the Party. The data should not be relied upon too heavily, but, at the same time, and as Almond argued, it should not be discounted for its lack of scientific rigour. A sufficient number of people, with a wide range of experience within a party relatively small during the period under review, were interviewed to allow trends and themes to be identified in the data which can be used to illustrate the importance of the grass-roots in the survival and revival of the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1964.

Joining the Liberal Party

WHEN?

Table 22 shows the years in which interviewees first joined the Liberal Party.

Table 22: When Interviewees Joined the Liberal Party

n = 142	Pre-war	1939–44	1945–49	1950–54	1955–59	1960–64
Number of interviewees joining Liberal Party (%)	12.7	6.3	29.6	15.5	23.9	12.0

Table 22 shows that Liberal Party recruitment was at its most intense in the late 1940s and the late 1950s, but was more limited during the early 1950s and the Second World War.⁶⁹⁴

Eight of the interviewees whose involvement with the Liberal Party had begun prior to 1939 claimed to have been born into the Party, with two playing an active part in the 1918 general election.⁶⁹⁵ Of the remainder, four joined at university during the 1930s, three joined Liberal associations, one campaigned in the 1929 general election, one collected subscriptions for the Party during the 1920s and one became a Liberal member as a result of hearing David Lloyd George speak in 1936. Limited recruitment during the 1939–44 period is unsurprising given the exigencies of wartime. Four of those recruited at this time claimed to have been born into the Party, two joined at university before periods of military service, one joined an LA, one helped found an LA at the age of sixteen, and one joined the Party because of the influence of friends.

Eighteen interviewees joined the Liberal Party in 1945, most citing the general election of that year as a motivating factor. Only three 1946 recruits were found, but recruitment

⁶⁹⁴ Although the figures suggest that Liberal Party recruitment tailed off after 1959, this is likely to be due to a bias in the interviewing sample against Liberals recruited in the early 1960s, several of whom, when contacted, felt that they had little to contribute

⁶⁹⁵ Both supported Liberals without the “coupon”

increased in the years from 1946 to 1949, during which time the Party attempted to rebuild itself in order to contest the next general election on a broad front.⁶⁹⁶ This reconstruction effort was not without impact. Of the 21 interviewees recruited in the 1947–49 period, thirteen signed up with or helped form a Liberal association or Young Liberal association, compared to eight who joined at university and one invited to stand as a Liberal candidate for election to Halifax Borough Council.⁶⁹⁷

Recruitment by Liberal associations collapsed after the 1950 general election. Eleven interviewees joined in 1950, all being recruited by local Liberal organisations around the time of the election. Of the remaining eleven recruited in the years from 1951 to 1954, five joined the Liberal Party at university, three joined an existing Liberal association, one helped establish a Liberal association, one helped form a YLA, and one began organising local election campaigns from a Liberal club. Unlike in the previous general election years of 1945 and 1950, recruitment remained slack in 1955. Only three interviewees joined the Liberal Party in that year, one at university, one as a result of helping out in the general election campaign, and one schoolboy from a strongly Liberal family. Recruitment blossomed thereafter. Four 1956 recruits were interviewed; five from 1957; seven from 1958 and thirteen from the general election year of 1959. Recruitment was slow again in 1960, but five interviewees joined in 1961 and eight in 1962. These results demonstrate the parlous position of Liberal associations in the early and mid-1950s and the revival they enjoyed after Jo Grimond became Liberal leader. As recruitment by local Liberal organisations grew after 1955, recruitment of Liberals at universities tailed off. Only three

⁶⁹⁶ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp13–16

⁶⁹⁷ Rasmussen also found evidence of the importance to the Liberal Party of personal contact, including organised recruitment drives, during the 1940–50 period — The Liberal Party, p185

interviewees who joined the Party between 1955–59, and none of the interviewees who joined after 1960, did so at university.

Six interviewees left the Liberal Party after their first involvement with it, rejoining at a later date. One, who first helped out in the 1945 general election campaign, remained outside the Party during the 1945–50 period for family reasons and because of a house move, rejoining to help with the 1950 election campaign. Another joined the Liberal Party at university in 1952 for “social” reasons and left the Party between 1955–58 before joining a Liberal association. One interviewee, active as a young girl in the 1920s, was outside the Party for many years until she offered to assist the Liberal Party HQ during the 1959 general election. A Liberal agent in 1945 drifted out of the Liberal Party in the late 1940s because of a number of career moves and because of disillusionment with the Party’s future prospects, rejoining in the mid-1950s. The other four were recruits between 1948–50 and all drifted out of the Liberal Party following the 1950 and 1951 election results, rejoining between 1958–61 once the Party’s fortunes had begun to revive.

How?

Table 23 shows how interviewees joined the Liberal Party.

Table 23: How Interviewees Joined the Liberal Party

Means of joining the Liberal Party	Number of interviewees
Joined Liberal association	32
Joined Liberal organisation at university	21
Helped in general election campaign	14
Born into Liberal Party	13
Involved in local politics	11
Joined Young Liberal association	9
Joined Liberal Party at school	8
Founded Liberal association	8
Joined as a result of hearing a Liberal speaker	7
Joined Liberal Party because of peer pressure	6
Used own initiative	4
Joined through a Liberal club	3
Recruited by Liberal Party HQ/Jo Grimond	3
Joined Party at a parliamentary by-election	3
Total	142

Table 23 illustrates the wide range of ways in which it was possible to join the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period. The predominant method was to pay a subscription to a constituency Liberal association. Several methods of recruitment were mentioned by interviewees, including canvassing, referendum cards and press advertisements. Two interviewees remembered being recruited to the executive committees of Liberal associations before paying a subscription fee. Another interviewee, who attended a Liberal Party public meeting after several years of political inactivity, was asked to stand for Parliament despite not being a member of the Party.⁶⁹⁸ A further sign of the weakness of Liberal associations was that eight interviewees joined the Liberal Party by founding, or helping to found, a district or constituency LA. Of the eight, one became active in 1947, one in 1951, and the remainder between 1957 and 1962.

⁶⁹⁸ Rasmussen found that “almost one-fifth” of the candidates he interviewed had become Liberal parliamentary candidates before joining the Party — *The Liberal Party*, p201

Youth organisations were vital recruitment grounds for the Liberal Party. As noted above, the majority of the 21 interviewees recruited at university joined the Party before 1955, including during periods when recruitment by Liberal associations was extremely limited. Fifteen interviewees were recruited at Oxford and Cambridge Universities: during the late 1940s and early 1950s the Liberal clubs at Oxford and Cambridge Universities were of similar size to the Labour and Conservative Clubs in both universities. Although Rasmussen detected evidence of the declining importance of Young Liberal and university Liberal organisations as recruiting grounds for activists from as early as the 1930s,⁶⁹⁹ the evidence suggests that such organisations were crucial means of recruiting Liberals well into the 1950s. Several of those interviewees who claimed to be active Liberals at school were Liberal candidates in mock elections which were often organised simultaneously with general elections; one established a Liberal club at Cranbrook School. Although only nine interviewees remembered joining the Liberal Party through a Young Liberal association, several more joined YLAs after university or after contributing to Liberal election campaigns and one founded a YLA in Halifax after first joining the town's Liberal association.

Nine of the fourteen interviewees who recalled first joining the Liberal Party by becoming involved in general election campaigns did so in 1945. Surprisingly, given the increased number of Liberal candidates contesting the 1950 election, only three interviewees were drawn into the Liberal Party by the campaign. Only one interviewee was brought into the Party by a general election campaign after 1950. Other election campaigns, particularly local political activity, became an increasingly important means of recruiting Liberals after

⁶⁹⁹ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p185

1955. Only three of the eleven interviewees recruited to the Liberal Party as a result of local electioneering joined before 1955 and six joined after 1958, reflecting the substantial increase in the number of Liberal councillors and municipal candidates from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s. Two of this group were specifically asked to stand as Liberal council candidates before joining a Liberal association and one formed an LA and was elected as a Liberal councillor as a result of forming a non-partisan campaign group opposed to a local motorway project. The three interviewees who joined the Liberal Party as a result of parliamentary by-election campaigns did so after 1958.

The other categories listed in Table 23 hide numerous means of joining the Liberal Party. Four interviewees joined having heard Jo Grimond speak, including at Liberal Assemblies and at the Royal Albert Hall in 1958. The oratory of David Lloyd George, Clement Davies and John Bannerman also attracted recruits to the Party. Two joined by writing to the Liberal Party Organisation for information or to enquire about Liberal activity in their locality. One first became involved with the Party by successfully applying to become a parliamentary candidate. Three interviewees were directly recruited by Jo Grimond, including one who quickly thereafter became a Liberal MP, one senior employee of the Liberal Party and a prominent academic. Friends and family were also influential in the recruitment of Liberals.

WHERE?

Table 24 shows in which parts of the country interviewees first joined the Liberal Party.

Table 24: Where Interviewees Joined the Liberal Party

Region (n = 142)	Number of interviewees	Number of interviewees (%)
South east England	26	18.3
North west England	19	13.4
London	18	12.7
South west England	14	9.9
East Anglia	14	9.9
West Midlands	14	9.9
Scotland	12	8.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	11	7.7
Northern England	6	4.2
East Midlands	5	3.5
Wales	3	2.0
Total	142	100.0

The first conclusion to be drawn from Table 24 is that Liberals were being recruited from all parts of the country during the 1945–64 period, not just from the Party’s traditional areas of strength, such as Scotland, Wales and south west England. Almost as many interviewees were recruited in the suburbs and small towns of southern England as were recruited from Scotland, Wales and south west England combined. Liberal recruitment in the north west of England — particularly Liverpool from the mid-1950s onwards, but also Manchester and its satellite towns — was strong and a surprising number of interviewees were first recruited in the West Midlands, an area where the Liberals were traditionally weak.

WHY?: FAMILY BACKGROUND

Table 25 shows the political influences exerted on interviewees by their families.

Table 25: Political Influences of Interviewees’ Families⁷⁰⁰

Family influence	pre-1939	1939–44	1945–49	1950–54	1955–59	1960–64	Total
Parents: Liberal	14	5	13	5	9	2	48
Conservative	1	1	10	5	5	3	25
Labour/left-wing				2	5	2	9
switched from Liberal to Conservative	1						1
Liberal, but not an influence		1	2	2		1	6
none, but later Liberal		1	1				2
working-class, anti-Labour				1			1
political, but not partisan			1		1		2
a mixture						1	1
none		1	6	5	7	3	22
Spouse Liberal	1		4		2		7
Sibling Liberal			1				1
Grandparents Liberal			4	1	3		8
Unknown	1		8	2	6	5	22
Total	18	9	50	23	38	17	155

Table 25 shows that throughout the 1945–64 period recruits to the Liberal Party were influenced by their parents’ support for the Liberal Party, but to a decreasing extent. Whereas fourteen of the eighteen interviewees who joined the Liberal Party before 1939 had Liberal-supporting parents, only two of the seventeen interviewees recruited after 1960 claimed a similar influence. This finding corresponds with Rasmussen’s conclusion that “inherited membership” of the Liberal Party, that is the unquestioned acceptance of parents’ Party affiliation, was of declining importance to the Party during the post-war period.⁷⁰¹

Interviewees were much more likely to come from a Conservative than a Labour background. This may be due to the Liberal Party being an overwhelmingly middle-class organisation, as Cyr argued, or it may reflect the desertion of many Liberal supporters for

⁷⁰⁰ Some interviewees cited several family influences

⁷⁰¹ Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party*, pp184–5, especially Table VIII, and see p198

the Conservative Party in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in southern England and suburban constituencies, or suggest that the Labour Party was regarded as too extreme by the progressive-minded children of Conservative supporters. Another interesting feature of Table 25 is the significant number of interviewees who explicitly ruled out a familial influence on their political beliefs, or failed to indicate any such influence during the interview. Although support for and membership of the Liberal Party was, for some people, hereditary, such Liberals were in a minority in their own Party.

WHY?: RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Table 26 shows the relationship between interviewees’ religious beliefs and membership of the Liberal Party.

Table 26: Interviewees’ Religious Beliefs and Liberal Party Membership

Religious influence	pre-1939	1939-44	1945-49	1950–54	1955–59	1960-64	Total number of interviewees
Nonconformist: total	7	3	8	4	3	1	26
of which, Methodist	2		3	3	1		9
Unitarian			1			1	2
United Reform	2						2
Baptist			1				1
Congregationalist		3					3
Other/not stated	3		3	1	2		9
Family nonconformist	1		1		1		3
Nonconformist, but not an influence			1	1	3		5
Jewish	1						1
Church of England			1		3	3	7
Church of England, but not an influence			1			1	2
Church of Scotland					1		1
Roman Catholic, not an influence					1		1
Unspecified religion, some influence	2						2
Agnostic			1				1
None	1	3	14	12	8	6	44
Unknown	6	3	15	5	14	6	49
Total	18	9	42	22	34	17	142

Table 26 demonstrates that, between 1945 and 1964, religious nonconformists formed a declining minority of the Liberal Party’s recruits. Religion was not a factor influencing the majority of interviewees’ decisions to join the Liberal Party and several interviewees cited their Anglican beliefs as motivation for joining the Party, despite the historical link between the Church of England and the Conservative Party. Whereas seven of the eighteen interviewees who had joined the Liberal Party before 1939 were influenced by their nonconformist religious beliefs, and a further four were in some way influenced by religious factors, only one of the seventeen interviewees who had joined the Liberal Party after 1960 was influenced by his religious nonconformity and only three other interviewees cited religious influences of any kind, all relating to Anglicanism.

WHY?: IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS

Table 27 shows the ideological factors cited by interviewees as reasons to join the Liberal Party.

Table 27: Ideological Reasons for Joining the Liberal Party⁷⁰²

Ideological factors		Number of interviewees
Relating to other parties:		
	Anti-Labour	12
	Anti-Conservative	6
	Anti-National Liberal	1
	Anti-two party system	5
	Liberals middle-of-the-road	1
	Total	25
Relating to policy issues:		
	Social issues/Beveridge legacy	6
	Opposed to influence of major financial interests — trade unions and big business	5
	Opposed to nationalisation and Clause IV	5
	Suez	5
	Europe/EEC	5
	Military issues/nuclear disarmament	4
	Co-ownership/co-partnership	4
	Free trade	3
	Grammar schools	2
	Anti-racialism	1
	Hola Camp massacres	1
	Land taxation/site value rating	1
	Proportional representation	1
	Total	43
Influenced by politicians and others:		
	Jo Grimond	11
	Sir Archibald Sinclair	2
	John Bannerman	1
	W. J. Brown	1
	Clement Davies	1
	Charles Dickens	1
	Isaac Foot	1
	Wallace Lawler	1
	David Lloyd George	1
	Total	20
Relating to political principles:		
	Liberal philosophy in general	6
	Individualism/freedom	5
	Anti-fascist	4
	Classlessness	3
	Anti-establishment	1
	Radicalism	1
	Total	20
Personal considerations:		
	Civic duty	4
	Ambition	3
	Liberals as underdogs/romantic streak	3
	Total	10
Other factors:		
	Local politics	11
	History	6
	1930s appeasement	4
	Total	21
Nothing specific ⁷⁰³		53

⁷⁰² Some interviewees cited several ideological influences

Several interviewees explained their decision to join the Liberal Party in terms of their opposition to the other major parties. As will be shown later, most interviewees regarded themselves as left-wing, radical or progressive and felt closer politically to the Labour Party than to the Conservative Party. Consequently, twice as many interviewees explained their decision to join the Liberal Party by emphasising the points on which they disagreed with the Labour Party as mentioned their generally categorical opposition to Conservatism. Five interviewees gave as a reason for joining the Liberal Party their disagreement with Britain's two-party electoral system, which was described as damaging to the country's interests or as encouraging the major parties to treat the electorate with contempt. Although often described as a middle-of-the-road party, equidistant between the Conservative and Labour Parties, only one interviewee claimed to have joined the Liberal Party because he was a "middle-of-the-road man".

A large number of interviewees were motivated to join the Liberal Party by its policies, particularly in relation to mainstream economic, social and foreign policy issues, rather than to perhaps more obscure traditional Liberal causes. Most significant were the perceived independence of the Liberal Party from the trades unions and big business, and related policies such as the Party's historic opposition to monopolies, and Liberal policy on nationalisation, which was regarded as more pragmatic than the ideological stances taken by the Conservative and Labour Parties. International issues, including support for European economic and political integration, were important factors in attracting recruits

⁷⁰³ Some interviewees were motivated to join the Liberal Party entirely as a result of family or religious influences, or stated that they regarded the Liberal Party as the best of the three major parties without going into further details

to the Liberal Party. Interviewees expressed opinions on several international issues, including the Suez expedition and the British role in the Cold War, which were reminiscent of the principles of Gladstone's foreign policy. The Liberal Party's policy on worker participation in, or co-ownership of, industry, which was developed during the 1930s and 1940s, specifically attracted four interviewees to the Party and, as we shall see, was supported by the vast majority of them. Other traditional Liberal causes were less important factors in recruitment to the Party. All of the interviewees attracted to the Liberal Party by its commitment to free trade joined before 1951 and one, who was first active when Asquith was Prime Minister, also cited the "Peace, Reform, Retrenchment" slogan as a motivating factor. Only one interviewee was specifically attracted to the Party by its support for electoral reform, there was similarly just one mention made of the taxation of land values as a motivation to join the Liberals, and other long-standing but, between 1945 and 1964, politically marginal Liberal causes, such as home rule for Scotland and Wales, were not mentioned.

Liberal philosophy influenced several interviewees' decisions to join the Liberal Party, some equating the Liberal Party's independence, tolerance of individual eccentricities, classlessness, and anti-establishment stance with liberalism. Four interviewees said that they joined the Liberal Party because liberalism was the opposite of fascism and a further four mentioned the 1930s policy of appeasement as a reason to support the Liberal Party rather than the Conservative Party. More interviewees joined the Liberal Party in order to contribute to civic society, or to pursue personal ambitions, including one interviewee who wished to become a Member of Parliament, than did so because of a wish to support the Liberal underdog against the two larger parties, but these personal considerations were

minor influences on Liberal recruitment.⁷⁰⁴ Rasmussen found that fourteen of his 63 interviewees cited civic duty as a motivation for joining the Liberal Party, but only four interviewees in this survey cited this influence.⁷⁰⁵ Three of those were parliamentary candidates, suggesting that a sense of civic duty explained why people stood for Parliament rather than why they joined the Liberal Party. A surprisingly important factor was the Liberal Party's history.⁷⁰⁶ Six interviewees cited the Liberals' historical record as reason to join the Party, with specific references being made to Fox, Gladstone and Lloyd George.

As has been described, Jo Grimond helped recruit Liberals, both directly, by choosing parliamentary candidates, political advisors and party employees, and also indirectly, by inspiring rank-and-file members to join the Party. Clement Davies and Archibald Sinclair, who had previously led the Party, were much less effective than Grimond at attracting people into the Liberal Party. The increasing importance of local issues in attracting recruits to the Liberal Party, especially after 1955, has also been noted. Local Liberal leaders, such as Wallace Lawler in Birmingham, were also important.

⁷⁰⁴ Rasmussen argued that a desire for maladjusted needs to be satisfied influenced around 10 per cent of the parliamentary candidates he interviewed to join the Party — The Liberal Party, pp188–96

⁷⁰⁵ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, p196

⁷⁰⁶ Rasmussen described intellectual motivations for joining the Liberal Party without mentioning the influence of the Party's history — The Liberal Party, p199

PAST POLITICAL ALLEGIANCES

Table 28 gives details of the 34 interviewees who claimed to have supported, voted for, been a member of, or an elected representative of, political parties and groupings other than the Liberal Party, prior to joining the Liberals.

Table 28: Interviewees’ Prior Political Allegiances

Previous political allegiances	pre-1954	post-1955	Total
Labour	8	17	25
Conservative	3	3	6
Other		2	2 ⁷⁰⁷
Labour and Conservative		1	1
Total	11	23	34

The first observation which can be drawn from Table 28 is that the majority of interviewees are not mentioned because they had not supported any other political party before joining the Liberal Party. As has been seen, many interviewees joined the Liberal Party when very young, including at school or university. Others had voted Liberal before joining the Party or could not recall how they had voted prior to becoming members of the Liberal Party. Of those who did admit to supporting, in some way, another political party before joining the Liberal Party, the majority had been Labour supporters. These included several active members of the Labour Party and one Labour county councillor who defected to the Liberal Party in 1962.

⁷⁰⁷ Including one former independent councillor and a member of the Progressive Association in Edinburgh

The number of interviewees who had been Labour sympathisers and joined the Liberal Party after 1955 was more than twice the number of former Labour supporters who had joined the Liberal Party before 1954. Of the eight Labour sympathisers who joined the Liberal Party before 1954, three cited Liberal policies as the reason for their switch, three expressed disillusionment with Labour or with the two-party system, and two did not give a reason. Those who joined after 1955 tended to give more specific reasons for their decision to move from supporting Labour to joining the Liberal Party. Four interviewees specifically cited Jo Grimond's leadership as the reason why they had joined the Liberal Party; two expressed dissatisfaction with the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union movement and two also criticised the Labour Party's nationalisation policies; one interviewee professed to have been a convinced Liberal while campaigning for the Labour Party before 1959, claiming that his objective had been to counter the influence of the National Liberals in his town. Four interviewees, who switched from supporting Labour to join the Liberal Party after 1955, explained their decisions by reference to local political factors, one having become disillusioned with Labour after hearing Dingle Foot speak. The former independent councillor and the member of the Edinburgh Progressive Association who joined the Liberal Party after 1955 also did so as a result of the growing influence of the Liberal Party in their localities. After 1955, therefore, both changes in the Liberal Party under Grimond's leadership and disillusionment with aspects of the Labour Party's policies and performance contributed to the increased recruitment of Labour sympathisers by the Liberal Party.

The three former Conservative sympathisers who joined the Liberal Party before 1954 had all supported the Conservative Party as a result of the influence of family and friends and

switched to the Liberal Party as they became more politically mature. Two did so on issues of political principle — the Suez crisis and the Hola Camp massacres — and the other had been a constituent and supporter of Edgar Granville and switched with Granville from the National Liberals to the Liberal Party in the early 1940s.

Rasmussen's findings with regard to parliamentary candidates broadly tally with those reported here. Of 63 candidates interviewed by Rasmussen, only seven had previously supported a party other than the Liberal Party, four backing Labour and three the Conservative Party.⁷⁰⁸ Brier also found that twice as many of the Liberals he interviewed in Torrington who had previously supported another political party had backed Labour rather than the Conservatives.⁷⁰⁹ The disparity in the numbers of Conservative- and Labour-sympathising interviewees switching to the Liberal Party found by this survey reflected the overwhelming judgement of interviewees that the Liberal Party was a left-wing party, something which will be considered in more detail later.

CONCLUSION

The data analysed above shows that a typical Liberal activist was recruited either during the national recruitment drives which preceded the 1950 election or during the years in which Jo Grimond was Liberal leader. He (or, less commonly, she) usually joined a Liberal association, possibly after helping a Liberal candidate in a general election campaign. If recruited before Grimond became leader, there is a good chance that he was recruited at

⁷⁰⁸ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp187–8

⁷⁰⁹ Brier, "Liberal Party Constituency Activity in the mid-1960s", p104

university, particularly Oxbridge. Although Liberals were recruited throughout the country, the typical recruit came from a comfortable suburb or medium-sized town in the south of England — Hendon, Enfield, Watford, Southend or Guildford, for instance — or from the districts of Liverpool and Manchester. These were often areas without any discernible Liberal tradition and recruits were sometimes required to found Liberal associations or to play a prominent part in keeping tiny organisations going.

Although many Liberals boasted of the traditional affiliation of their families to the Party, or of the links between their nonconformist faith and liberalism, these were of diminishing influence on recruitment to the Liberal Party and after 1960 only a very small proportion of recruits became Liberals because of family or religious influences. Combinations of ideological factors became of increasing significance. A typical recruit would be motivated by his opposition to the twin vested interests of big business and the trade union/labour movement, represented in Parliament by the Conservative and Labour Parties. He would wish to stand up for the small man, the independent thinker, the classless modern family against the old class-dominated political structure. A typical Liberal activist would not be persuaded to join the Liberal Party because of its commitment to electoral reform, devolution, free trade or land taxation. Instead, mainstream economic, social, industrial and international issues would have influenced his decision to join the Liberal Party, particularly the Liberal policies on co-ownership in industry, UK membership of the EEC, and opposition to the Suez adventure. Jo Grimond's charismatic ideas-driven leadership brought many recruits into the Liberal Party, but a typical activist, if recruited after 1955, might have been persuaded to join by local political factors in areas where Liberal candidates were being elected to local government office. Finally, although a typical

Liberal activist would have at least supported the Party throughout his adult life, he would have seen himself as fundamentally anti-Conservative and in sympathy with the Labour Party's approach to politics, if not its institutional link with the trade union movement and Clause IV of its constitution.

These conclusions tally with the thrust of Rasmussen's findings. He too noted the declining importance of family and religious factors in recruitment to the Liberal Party and the increasing importance of ideological influences. He found that few Liberal parliamentary candidates had ever supported another political party and that most of those that had done had been inclined towards Labour. He concluded that only a minority of Liberal candidates was influenced by "maladjusted needs", or alienation from society, to join the Liberal Party and, similarly, very few of those interviewed here gave the impression that they had been driven into the Liberal Party by a dissatisfaction with society as a whole. The importance of the results discussed above lies in the fact that they relate to a broad cross-section of the Liberal Party, not just parliamentary candidates. There were no appreciable differences between parliamentary candidates and non-parliamentary candidates in terms of the answers they gave to questions concerning why, when, how and where they had joined the Liberal Party, with one exception. Rasmussen found that personal considerations, including ambition, civic duty, social and avocational reasons, were important influences on the recruitment of parliamentary candidates, but these were less important influences on non-parliamentary candidates.

Activists' Opinions

Interviewees were asked a range of questions about the following issues relevant to the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period.

- Support for constitutional reform, particularly the introduction of proportional representation, devolution of power in Scotland and Wales, and regional government for England, was assessed. Electoral reform was a traditional cornerstone of the Liberal Party's programme and the Liberals had been keen advocates of devolution during the 1950s, and of regional government in the 1960s. All of these issues were on the margins of national political debate during the 1945–64 period.
- Attitudes to UK membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), of which the Liberals were early and enthusiastic advocates, and free trade, another traditional Liberal policy, which some Liberal activists thought would be compromised by EEC membership, were explored.
- Interviewees were asked for their views on the Liberal policy on the UK's independent nuclear deterrent, a new issue on which there was no traditional Liberal line.
- Fourthly, interviewees' attitudes towards trade unionism and the Liberal policy of workers' co-ownership of industry were examined. Cyr suggested that suspicion of vested interests, such as trade unions, might characterise Liberal members and this question was intended to investigate that hypothesis. The question also helped reveal Liberals' views on the Labour Party and the labour movement.

- Perceptions of the Liberals' place in the British political system were sought by asking interviewees whether they agreed with the strategy of the realignment of the left, expounded by Jo Grimond.
- Finally, interviewees were asked for their views on the leaders of the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period, Clement Davies and Jo Grimond, in order that their effects on recruitment and the development of the Party could be further explored.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Interviewees were asked whether or not they supported the introduction of proportional representation for UK elections, devolution for Scotland and Wales, and regional government in England. All of these policies were rooted in the heritage of the Liberal Party and were to be found in the Party's 1964 election manifesto.

Overwhelming unqualified support, from 105 out of 121 interviewees answering the question, was expressed for the introduction of proportional representation. Many of those in favour of proportional representation emphasised the strength of their support or explained that its introduction was crucial for the future prospects of the Liberal Party. Few supporters of proportional representation explained which system they favoured most. Three of those interviewed supporting the introduction of proportional representation specifically advocated the alternative vote system; one mentioned the single transferable vote system; and one interviewee argued in favour of the German additional member system. Just one of the sixteen interviewees who did not wholeheartedly back proportional representation expressed opposition to its introduction, on the grounds that a reformed

electoral system might lead to weak government. Five interviewees agreed with proportional representation but argued that it was not an important policy in terms of attracting support to the Liberal Party. Six broadly agreed with proportional representation but expressed reservations about its implementation and effects, and three interviewees claimed that it was cynical of the Liberals to advocate electoral reform so strongly and that the policy was irrelevant because it would not be introduced before a Liberal government was elected. The remaining interviewees were indifferent to the issue.

Support for devolution in Scotland and Wales was less solid, although still strong. 82 interviewees out of 121 who answered the question expressed unqualified support for the principle of devolution of power in Scotland and Wales. Only three interviewees were entirely opposed to devolution. Nineteen interviewees were unsure about whether or not to support devolution or expressed reservations about the ways in which devolution might be carried out. A common concern was that devolution might lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom, although two Scottish interviewees were concerned that devolution would lead to permanent Labour government in Scotland. The remaining interviewees who answered the devolution question were either not interested in the subject or said that it was a matter for the Scots and Welsh to decide.

Although all of the interviewees were asked for their views on regional government in England, only 38 answered with specific reference to the issue. One interviewee, a candidate in the 1964 general election, claimed to be only “dimly aware” of the Liberals’ policy on regional government, and this may have led to the limited response to the question. No doubt many interviewees who said that they agreed with devolution, or

questioned the details of the policy, intended their answer to cover regional government as well. Of those specifically mentioning regional government, 23 were in favour of it, five were opposed and the rest said that they were unsure about it or had no view. In conclusion, therefore, there was widespread support among Liberal activists for the Party's distinctive constitutional reform agenda, although a significant number of interviewees questioned how such policies could be successfully implemented or argued that they were electorally unimportant, and the Party's policies on regional government were not well known.

FREE TRADE AND THE COMMON MARKET

Interviewees were reminded that the Liberal Assembly had passed resolutions in favour of the UK joining the European Economic Community in 1959, 1960, and 1962 despite opposition from a group of activists who argued that support for the EEC ran contrary to the Party's traditional commitment to free trade, and then asked whether they supported the Assembly's decisions and for their opinions on the free trade question. An overwhelming majority of those interviewees who answered the question — 109 out of 128 — had supported UK membership of the EEC in the period prior to 1964. As well as the five who had claimed that the Liberal Party's policy on membership of the EEC had attracted them to the Party (Table 27), one interviewee stated that the Party's European policy had kept him in the Party. Of those interviewees who gave reasons why they supported membership of the EEC, sixteen argued that they supported further political integration within Europe; twelve thought that membership of the EEC would increase UK trade, including eight who saw membership of the EEC as a step towards global free trade;

ten responded that the EEC would help prevent future wars in Europe; and two interviewees regarded the EEC as a first step towards a federal world government.

Only nine interviewees expressed outright opposition to British membership of the EEC although a further five were ambivalent or gave lukewarm support and five claimed not to remember the debate or were not interested in the issue. Of those against British membership, only six were so as a result of their support for free trade — two interviewees disagreed with the political implications of EEC membership and one was against the Common Agricultural Policy. This suggests that free trade was no longer an issue which motivated the majority of Liberal activists and determined their attitudes to new political issues, such as European economic integration. Interviewees' opinions on the free trade issue in general support this hypothesis. Despite being asked for their views on free trade, as well as on the EEC, 53 interviewees answered without mentioning free trade. Thirty-three interviewees expressed scepticism towards or lack of interest in the concept of free trade. Of these, ten specifically expressed their opposition to the free trade faction within the Liberal Party, led by Oliver Smedley and S. W. Alexander; three stated that worldwide free trade was not possible, two interviewees expressed doubts about the impact free trade might have had on the UK economy, and two disagreed with the principle of free trade; five thought free trade an old-fashioned, outdated idea; and thirteen interviewees said that they were simply not interested in free trade. Twenty-two interviewees said that they supported both free trade and UK membership of the EEC, with several questioning how the two concepts could be regarded as incompatible. Of the nine interviewees who were neither wholly supportive of or opposed to UK membership of the EEC, just two said that they were strong supporters of free trade and only one supporter of UK membership

qualified his remarks by expressing concern that the EEC could prove a protectionist organisation.

These results are perhaps surprising given that Rasmussen noted the ability of the free trade faction to rally support for unilateral free trade at the 1953 and 1956 Liberal Assemblies and to ensure resolutions were passed at Assemblies against the related issue of state protection of agricultural markets.⁷¹⁰ Douglas, himself a supporter of the Smedley/Alexander faction, argued that the decision of the 1962 Liberal Assembly to support UK membership of the EEC led to “some important losses” from the Party and that the issue might have created “intolerable strains” in the Liberal Party, had not negotiations for UK entry collapsed in 1963. Douglas also cited a Gallup opinion poll of October 1962 in which 32 per cent of those “inclining” towards the Liberal Party opposed UK membership of the EEC.⁷¹¹ The interview data strongly suggests that Liberal activists, in contrast to some Liberal voters, were strongly supportive of UK membership of the EEC, that very few Liberals were opposed to UK membership on the grounds of its likely impact on the progress towards global free trade, and that a declining proportion of Liberal activists was interested in or motivated by the traditional Liberal rallying cry of free trade.

THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT

Rasmussen has described how Jo Grimond changed the Liberal Party’s defence policy during the 1955 Parliament to one of opposition to the UK’s independent nuclear

⁷¹⁰ Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp133–142

⁷¹¹ Douglas, History of the Liberal Party, pp274–5

deterrent.⁷¹² Grimond devised the policy himself over the 1956–57 Christmas holiday and then announced his conclusions in Liberal News in February 1957.⁷¹³ Rasmussen noted that the LPO lacked enthusiasm for the new policy, which was not endorsed by the 1957 Liberal Assembly and was backed by the 1958 Assembly only after the fortuitous intervention of an ally of Grimond. Interviewees were asked for their opinions of the policy, in order to examine the extent to which it was supported by activists.

Sixty-six interviewees agreed with the Grimond line on the UK's independent nuclear deterrent, although five expressed reservations. Around half of those in favour answered the question in a vague way or simply stated that they supported Grimond, without explaining why the UK should not have possessed an independent nuclear deterrent, including four interviewees who explicitly stated that they were not interested in the issue but backed the Grimond line, and one who harboured grave misgivings about the policy but thought it best to back the Party leader. Thirty-one interviewees disagreed with Grimond's policy, some vehemently, and all explained in detail the reasons for their opinions. These interviewees were drawn from a representative cross-section of the total sample. Seven interviewees answered the question by explaining that they were in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament, a more extreme position on the nuclear weapons issue than that advocated by the Liberal leader. Fourteen interviewees expressed no strong views on the issue of the UK's nuclear weapons, including one parliamentary candidate who was adamant that the Party had never adopted the policy expressed by Grimond.

⁷¹² Rasmussen, The Liberal Party, pp123–28

⁷¹³ See Behrens Papers, letters from J. Grimond to L. Behrens, 5 Jan 57 and 11 Mar 57

This analysis shows the importance of the influence which could be exerted by the Liberal leader on Party policy, particularly in relation to new issues. One-quarter of those interviewees expressing an opinion were strongly in favour of the UK's independent nuclear deterrent, one-quarter were strongly against and around one-quarter were happy to go along with Grimond's line. A small minority of interviewees wished the Liberal Party to go further and support unilateral nuclear disarmament. The depth of these divisions, far greater than the depth of those relating to the other issues on which interviewees were asked their opinions, explains the unenthusiastic response of the Liberal Party Organisation to Grimond's initiative. It is tempting to think that, if Grimond had instead decided to support the UK's independent deterrent, then most of the Party would have supported him, with one-third of Liberal activists arguing strongly against him or advocating unilateral disarmament.

TRADE UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Cyr has argued that Liberals were "consistent in their suspicion of, or great hostility to, organised 'interests'" and that the Liberal Party "automatically repelled association with large collectivist interest groups".⁷¹⁴ Consequently, it is not surprising that there is evidence of an ambivalent relationship between the Liberal Party and the trade union movement.⁷¹⁵ Interviewees were asked about their attitudes to the trade union movement, and in particular the political role of trade unions, and for their views on the distinctive Liberal

⁷¹⁴ Cyr, Liberal Party Politics, p67

⁷¹⁵ See p24

policy of workers' co-ownership of industry. Their responses revealed that the attitudes of Liberal activists to trade unionism were more complex than Cyr's hypothesis suggests.

The majority of respondents — 87 out of 110 — was in favour of trade unions in principle. Typical comments included that trade unions were “essential”, “necessary” and “bastions of freedom”. Twenty-six interviewees said that they were trade unionists themselves, including one who held a senior position in the National Union of Teachers, and three interviewees remembered receiving support from unions when they stood for Parliament. Most of those interviewees who were supportive of trade unions, however, thought that the institutions would benefit from reform. Twenty-four interviewees said that, although they supported trade unions, they disagreed with the link between trade unions and the Labour Party. The reasons given for this opinion included that the trade union movement had been damaged or weakened by its association with the Labour Party, and that it was disadvantageous for society as a whole for Labour to be dominated by trade union interests. Thirty-two interviewees suggested other ways in which the trade union movement could have been reformed, including by reducing the power of the trade unions and by decentralising decision making, particularly pay bargaining, within unions.

Only 23 interviewees exhibited the suspicion or hostility to trade unions which Cyr suggested might be indicative of Liberal activists. The reasons given by interviewees for opposing trade unions mirrored those given by interviewees who supported trade unions but wished for them to be reformed. The trade unions' link with Labour was mentioned by seven interviewees opposed to trade unions, some of whom argued that they saw no distinction between the Labour Party and trade unions. Eight interviewees opposed to trade

unions criticised the power they wielded; typical was the comment that trade union militants were enemies of liberalism. Five interviewees, two supportive of trade unions and three opposed, criticised the conservatism of the trade union movement, contrasting the unions' resistance to reform with the radicalism of the Liberal Party.

Responses to the question about the Liberal policy of co-ownership further demonstrated the ambivalent attitude of Liberal activists to trade unions. Co-ownership was developed as the Liberal alternative to the interaction between management and trade unions in the work-place, which, if introduced, would effect a transfer of power from trade union leaderships to shop floor workers. Interviewees were typically enthusiastic about the policy of co-ownership, with 94 of the 121 interviewees responding to the question, expressing unqualified support for it. Many would have agreed with the response of one interviewee that co-ownership was a cornerstone of Liberal policy. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s there was debate within the Liberal Party about whether co-ownership should involve workers owning shares in the firms they worked for, or just being represented in the boardroom, and whether or not the Party should advocate compulsory co-ownership. These debates were reflected by the seventeen interviewees who supported co-ownership with reservations about how it could be implemented. Just three interviewees were opposed to co-ownership, one because he considered it unrealistic and two who were supporters of the Smedley/Alexander free trade faction within the Party and regarded co-ownership as antithetical to free trade. One backer of co-ownership changed his mind for the same reason.

Cyr's characterisation of the Liberal Party as a home for middle-class individualists, suspicious of or hostile towards vested interests such as the trade union movement is only partly borne out by the interview data reported above. Liberal activists were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the prevailing method of industrial organisation in the UK, with its rigid distinction between capital and labour, but the majority of interviewees described trade unions as necessary institutions, if in need of reform, and more interviewees were trade unionists themselves than were against the organisations. The hostility of Liberals towards powerful vested interests was reflected in the widespread distaste for the institutional link between the trade union movement and the Labour Party, which was expressed in terms of the damage it was judged to cause to the unions, the economy, and society as a whole, rather than in terms of the political advantages it conferred on the Labour Party.

REALIGNMENT OF THE LEFT

In a series of speeches and interviews during 1958 and 1959, Jo Grimond expressed the hope that the Liberal Party would be the catalyst for the creation of a new progressive party, to which “Liberally-minded socialists and ... liberals of all varieties” would rally.⁷¹⁶ Although Grimond said that he was keen for liberal minded Conservatives to join such a party, his main emphasis was on the need for the radical or progressive wing of politics — the Liberal and Labour parties — to realign, so that a non-Socialist alternative to the Conservative Party could emerge.

⁷¹⁶ Speech at the National Liberal Club, 14 Nov 59

Interviewees were asked for their views on the concept of the “realignment of the left” in British politics in order to assess their view of where the Liberal Party stood in relation to the Conservative and Labour Parties. The majority of interviewees — 94 out of 118 answering the question — agreed with the concept. Nine specifically stated that they did so because they were, in the words of one such interviewee, “morally opposed” to the Conservative Party and thirteen interviewees stated that the Liberal Party was a left-wing party and that it was desirable for the left of British politics to be reunited. Two interviewees supported realignment despite expressing hostility towards the Labour Party but others claimed to have “socialist tendencies” or to have supported previous visions of realignment, including the Popular Front movement of the 1930s.

Almost one-third of the 24 interviewees opposed to realignment said that they took that view because they rejected the notion that the Liberal Party was left-wing and urged more vigorous opposition to Labour. Other reasons for disagreeing with realignment included that the strategy was unrealistic, tactically naïve, or would compromise the identity of the Liberal Party. Opponents of realignment tended to have been recruited into the Liberal Party before 1955. Only five opponents of realignment were recruited after 1955 and only one of those joined the Liberal Party after 1960. Most of those Liberals opposed to UK membership of the EEC — six of the eight who answered the question — or who were strong supporters of free trade — seven out of ten — also tended to oppose realignment.

These results provide further support for the hypothesis that most Liberal activists saw themselves as being on the left of British politics, principally opposed to the Conservative Party and sharing historical and philosophical links with the Labour Party. Liberal activists

tended to oppose Labour's "dogmatism" — represented by clause IV of the party's constitution — and its institutional link with the trade union movement. Strip these away and a non-socialist progressive party of the kind Grimond envisaged would remain and might have attracted the support of many Liberal activists. Nevertheless, a significant minority of Liberal activists did not support realignment because they did not share the view that the Liberal Party was philosophically closer to the Labour Party than the Conservatives. These tended to be older Liberals, recruited before Jo Grimond became Liberal leader, who zealously guarded the Party's independence and identity and included activists who disagreed with other aspects of Grimond's leadership. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that this group was in the minority even of interviewees who joined the Party before 1955.

Cyr, using the results of his survey of activists, argued that Liberals did not see themselves as part of the left-right political continuum, but instead saw themselves "at one end of a different spectrum — the individualist end — while Tory and Labour are grouped at the opposite collectivist pole, the reverse of liberalism".⁷¹⁷ Some of the data presented above could be used to bear out Cyr's conclusion. Several interviewees cited their beliefs in liberty and individualism as motivations for joining the Liberal Party, others mentioned their opposition to the two-party electoral system, while many expressed disagreement with the Conservative and Labour Parties. It is likely that, if interviewees had been asked explicitly whether they were to the left or right of British politics, some would have suggested that a political spectrum akin to that proposed by Cyr would more accurately describe their political position. Nevertheless, when asked about realignment, very few

⁷¹⁷ Cyr, Liberal Party Politics in Britain, p245. This reflects the views propounded by some senior Liberals, for example D. Wade, Our Aim and Purpose (LPO, 1961) pp11–13

interviewees suggested that the concept was flawed because both the Conservative and Labour Parties stood opposite to the Liberal Party at the collectivist end of an individualist/collectivist political spectrum. Most interviewees either accepted the notion that the Liberal Party stood alongside the Labour Party at the radical or progressive end of the political spectrum, opposed to the right-wing Conservative Party, or challenged the notion by arguing for the Liberal Party's independence from both larger parties. Only one interviewee rejected the validity of a left-right political spectrum with respect to the Liberal Party, but he qualified his answer by stating that he was more interested in local than national politics.

LIBERAL LEADERS

It was noted above that a significantly greater number of interviewees cited Jo Grimond as an influence on their decision to join the Liberal Party than mentioned Clement Davies and that recruitment to the Liberal Party, weak in the early 1950s, increased considerably when Grimond became leader. In order to test in more detail the impact made on Liberal activists by the two Liberal leaders during the 1945–64 period, interviewees were asked for their opinions of Jo Grimond and Clement Davies.

Grimond was held in high regard by almost all the 134 interviewees who responded to the question about him. Just seven interviewees said that they found him uninspiring or disagreed with the political direction in which he took the Party. Of these seven, four were supporters of the free trade faction previously identified as opposed to the concept of the realignment of the left and to British membership of the EEC. Two had drifted out of

Liberal politics during the 1940s and the remaining opponent of Grimond was a parliamentary colleague motivated primarily by personal considerations.

There was a consensus amongst supporters of Grimond that he was charismatic, inspiring, an intellectual who could articulate ideas well, particularly on television, and a magnet capable of drawing talent into the Liberal Party. Typical comments included that Grimond's emergence as Liberal leader represented a new beginning for the Party, that he was a breath of fresh air, a moderniser, a classless meritocrat, and that he was a hero whom Liberals could worship. Grimond's supporters were also able to identify flaws in his leadership, however. Ten supporters described him as vague, dreamy or woolly, an ideas man unable to marry his philosophical approach with practical political considerations, and one considered that his wife was the driving force behind his political career. Fourteen supporters described him as aloof from Liberal activists or thought that he neglected the Party's organisation, particularly in relation to local elections. A number of interviewees described him as aristocratic or patrician in his outlook, and one argued that he was too much of a gentleman to lead a political party. Three supporters detailed their personal difficulties with Grimond and one prominent activist thought that "beneath the surface of a very lazy man ... there was a very lazy man".

Interviewees' opinions of Clement Davies were more mixed and, on balance, mostly negative. Twenty-eight interviewees, out of 88 who answered the question, described him as ineffective, uninspiring, unimpressive or weak, including one parliamentary colleague and a number of prominent parliamentary candidates. Davies was criticised for a number of reasons. Ten interviewees thought that he was right-wing with several being particularly

critical of the time he spent as a National Liberal. Thirteen interviewees described him as old-fashioned, antiquated, or belonging to the Lloyd George era and fifteen interviewees, including both supporters and detractors, described Davies as a passionate, emotional orator (or a “ranter and raver” as one opponent put it) rather than a leader interested in the detail of policy. One interviewee described Davies as too Welsh to be a leader of a political party.

Eighteen interviewees described Davies as a good Liberal leader, mostly praising his personal characteristics: “a grand chap”, “selfless”, or “clever”. Supporters of Davies included four interviewees who gave precisely the same assessment of both leaders. Thirteen interviewees praised Davies for keeping the Liberal flag flying, or holding the Party together, particularly in relation to his decision not to accept a seat in Churchill’s Cabinet after the 1951 general election. The only other issue in relation to which Davies was praised, by one interviewee, was his part in the Seretse Khama affair. Eight interviewees concluded that Davies had done all he could as leader, even if that did not amount to very much, nineteen interviewees, mostly Liberal association activists before 1956 but including one senior parliamentary candidate, regarded Davies as vague or distant or had no firm recollection of him, and one prominent Young Liberal from the early 1950s described his political career as a “paradox”.

These results give a new insight into the revival of the Liberal Party under Jo Grimond’s leadership, particularly the revival of recruitment to the Party. Although Clement Davies was respected by many Liberal members, and regarded as having secured the Party’s independence, he was too old-fashioned, out of touch with modern politics, and

uninterested in new policy development to draw people into the Liberal Party. Grimond, on the other hand, and despite the faults noted by those that worked with him, did attract people to the Liberal Party. Whereas Davies' supporters tended to praise his personality or the determination with which he stuck to a difficult task, Grimond's supporters tended to be enthusiastic in their praise in all respects, often listing his personal and political attractions and emphasising his inspirational qualities. This suggests that Grimond's influence on recruitment to the Liberal Party is under estimated in Table 27, although the criticism that he could have done more to encourage Liberal involvement in local government should be noted.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above does not sustain Cyr's thesis that Liberal activists were nineteenth-century individualists stranded in the collectivist twentieth century. Instead, most Liberal activists regarded themselves as being on the left of British politics, even if they preferred to use the word "radical" or "progressive" rather than "left", primarily opposed to the Conservative Party. Activists' relationships with the Labour Party were more ambivalent than the almost universal hostility shown towards Conservatism. Some activists claimed to have "socialist tendencies", or had voted Labour in the absence of Liberal candidates, and some were Labour members both during and after the 1945–64 period. The majority agreed with the notion that the Labour and Liberal Parties had to get together in some way to form a new, stronger entity to challenge the Conservative Party. Two elements tended to warn Liberal activists off the Labour Party — its institutional link with the trade union movement and its commitment to nationalisation of the means of

production, enshrined in clause IV of Labour's constitution. Both of these elements, particularly the trade union link, offended the importance activists placed on individual freedom and their opposition to vested interests in society. Nevertheless, most Liberals did see the need for a strong trade union movement and, through the policy of co-ownership, attempted to define an alternative to the clash of vested interests which characterised British industrial relations, and politics.

A small minority of Liberal activists rejected this perception of the position of the Liberal Party but not, in most cases, for the reasons suggested by Cyr. This minority was motivated by concern that realignment of the left would compromise the hard-fought independence of the Liberal Party, just when it seemed that the Party was beginning to pull itself out of the abyss. Amongst this minority was the free trade faction who opposed British membership of the EEC and was also mostly hostile to Jo Grimond. Although capable of motivating support behind the old Liberal nostrum of free trade at successive Liberal Assemblies in the early and mid-1950s, at a time when the Liberal leadership showed little interest in the Assembly or policy formation more generally, the faction itself was numerically very small. Most Liberal activists regarded support for free trade and the EEC as synonymous and, by the 1960s, the free trade slogan had lost its earlier force and meaning.

It would not appear that Liberal activists were more radical or extreme than the Party leadership between 1945 and 1964. When asked about constitutional issues, for example, few Liberals were wholehearted exponents of regional government, a feature of the Party's 1964 election manifesto, despite many supporting federalism in the European context.

Rather than calling for greater innovation in the Party's constitutional policies, most Liberals were enthusiastic only for electoral reform. Similarly, few interviewees argued that Grimond should have gone further than calling for the UK to scrap plans for its own nuclear deterrent and advocated unilateral disarmament, and many preferred the policies of the two major parties on this issue to the Liberal policy. It is possible that Liberal activists were more radical than the party leadership in relation to other issues. Unlike with the Conservative and Labour Parties, there are no obvious issues — such as the nationalisation or privatisation of industry, or the extent of Government involvement in the economy — which helped define the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period. Considering some of the Party's main themes at that time, however, most Liberal activists did not generally support more extreme stances than did the leadership.⁷¹⁸ This conclusion suggests that Janosik's finding that Labour activists tended to be more radical, the weaker the constituency party to which they belonged, does not apply to the Liberal Party, as most of the interviewees analysed above were members of weak Liberal associations in constituencies which the Liberal Party could not hope to win during the 1945–64 period.⁷¹⁹

Liberal Activists and Voters

It is possible to compare the data presented above with the results of Butler and Stokes' analysis of the British Election Studies data for the 1959–64 period, to examine similarities and differences between Liberal activists and voters. Butler and Stokes found that Liberal

⁷¹⁸ Brier also found that the Liberal activists he interviewed tended to be strong supporters of the party line on a range of topical issues — “Liberal Party Constituency Activity in the mid-1960s”, pp130a–131

⁷¹⁹ E.G. Janosik, Constituency Labour Parties in Britain (Pall Mall Press, 1968) p59

voters were a constantly changing group.⁷²⁰ There was a greater movement of voters between the Conservative and Liberal Parties than between the Labour and Liberal Parties during this period. Between 1959 and 1963 the Liberal Party benefited from a net gain of supporters from the Conservatives amounting to 3.1 per cent of the electorate, compared to a gain from Labour of 1.1 per cent. Between 1963 and 1964 many of these erstwhile supporters moved back to their respective parties, with the Liberals witnessing a net loss in support of 2.1 per cent of the electorate to the Conservative Party and 0.2 per cent to the Labour Party.⁷²¹ The preponderance of disaffected Conservatives professing to support the Liberal Party prior to the 1964 election was one factor in the finding that more Liberal supporters in 1964 gave the Conservative Party as their second preference than the Labour Party by a margin of three to two.⁷²²

These principal findings of Butler and Stokes' study contrast with the picture which has emerged from the interview data assessed above. Liberal activists unsurprisingly tended to be steady supporters of the Liberal Party and most of those who had previously backed another party had been Labour supporters. As has been shown, Liberal activists leant to the left of British politics, favouring a realignment of the progressive wing of politics to combat conservatism and supporting the principle, if not necessarily the practice, of trade unionism. Whereas most activists were fundamentally anti-Conservative and sympathetic to aspects of Labour's political approach, the Liberal Party was attracting the support of disillusioned Conservatives who, while flirting with the Liberals, still preferred the Conservative Party to Labour.

⁷²⁰ See p19

⁷²¹ Butler and Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1974) pp258–60, tables 12.5 and 12.6

⁷²² Butler and Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1969) p332

In other respects, Liberal activists and supporters shared much in common during the 1959–64 period. Butler and Stokes found that one-sixth of Liberal supporters cited hostility to both major parties as their main reason for backing the Liberal Party in 1964, exceeding the proportion of supporters of the other parties claiming likewise, echoing the disenchantment expressed by Liberal activists with the two major parties and the electoral system in Table 27.⁷²³ Forty-five per cent of Liberal supporters said in 1963 that they thought both big businesses and trade unions had becoming too powerful, compared to only 30 per cent expressing similar sentiments in the Labour and Conservative Parties, again echoing the opposition of Liberal activists to the influence exerted by vested interests.⁷²⁴ Butler and Stokes also showed that, just as religious and family influences were declining motivations for people to join the Liberal Party, they were declining predictors of Liberal support in the post-war period.⁷²⁵ Finally, Butler and Stokes found that, as with Liberal activists, the reaction of Liberal supporters to Jo Grimond was overwhelmingly positive.⁷²⁶

Butler and Stokes demonstrated that there did exist a core Liberal vote in the UK in the mid-1960s, although its size is open to question. Although ten per cent of electors described themselves as Liberals in 1963 and eleven per cent did so in 1964, the fluid nature of the Liberal vote, noted above, and the Party's failure to field candidates in over 250 constituencies in 1964 meant that only 22.0 per cent of Liberal voters in the 1964

⁷²³ Ibid., p322

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p323

⁷²⁵ Butler and Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1974) pp156–66 especially p165 and p168

⁷²⁶ Butler and Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1969) p324

election had also voted Liberal in 1959.⁷²⁷ That core vote was supplemented by disaffected Conservatives during the 1959 Parliament, who drifted towards the Liberal Party before 1963 and then drifted away again before the general election. There is evidence that core Liberal supporters shared some of the characteristics of Liberal activists, in terms of their attitudes to big business and trade unions, Jo Grimond, the two major parties, and the relationship between family and religious influences and support for the Liberal Party. The Liberal dilemma, during the 1959 Parliament at least, was that Liberal activists were predominantly left-leaning and anti-Conservative whereas those electors most tempted to back the Party were Conservatives. The existence of this tension between Liberal activists and supporters goes some way towards explaining the Liberal Party's apparent failure to grasp the opportunity for advancement after the Orpington by-election.

Conclusion

The experience of the National Liberal Party shows that parties are unable to survive if they cannot recruit local activists and sustain grass-roots organisations. A major factor in the Liberal Party's survival was its ability to attract new recruits after 1945. Social reasons, including the influence of family and friends, and religious factors were significant in the early part of the 1945–64 period but declined in importance over time. Vital throughout the period were ideological and policy factors. Liberalism, if not always consistently interpreted, continued to make new converts: there remained a bloc of political activists who were not attracted by conservatism or socialism. Liberal policies on the co-ownership of industry and the Common Market were also important factors. Avocational factors, such

⁷²⁷ Butler and Stokes, Political Change in Britain (1969) p380 and (1974) p256

as the desire to be elected to Parliament, did influence some Liberals, particularly those who were parliamentary candidates, but were not vital.

Table 22 shows that the flow of new recruits to the Liberal Party slowed after 1950 and, without the continuing strength of university Liberal clubs, would have all but ceased. The replacement of Liberal leader Clement Davies with Jo Grimond, and the 1956 Suez crisis, together helped revive recruitment, and provided impetus to the Liberal revival. Grimond played a crucial role in attracting people to the Liberal Party. Another feature of recruitment during Grimond's leadership was the influence of local issues, due to the Party's increasing focus on fighting local elections.

Finally, Table 24 shows that the Liberal Party was able to recruit members from throughout the country during the 1945–64 period and was not concentrated in fringe areas of the United Kingdom. The strength of recruitment in suburban south east England and the hinterlands of Manchester and Liverpool was a further reflection of the Party's focus on local government, as the next Chapter will show. The new recruits were different from longer-standing Liberals including, as Brier has suggested, by having less strong religious and family links with the Party.⁷²⁸ Brier's argument that "the Party may ... be hard pressed in the future to survive, let alone expand, and if it does survive, it seems likely to become increasingly the transitory political home for those temporarily discontented with the major parties" was not prescient, however, because many new recruits were as wedded to liberalism and respect for the Liberal political tradition as their predecessors.⁷²⁹ The

⁷²⁸ Brier, "Liberal Party Constituency Activity in the mid-1960s", p227

⁷²⁹ Ibid., p330

continuing appeal of liberalism to some political activists was one of the primary reasons for the Liberal Party's survival.

VI. Liberals in Local Government

Introduction

In this Chapter it will be argued that the post-war revival of the Liberal Party began with activists in several parts of the UK, acting independently, placing a new emphasis on local government elections as a means of building up Liberal organisation, enhancing the Party's credibility with the electorate, and developing the capability to fight parliamentary elections successfully. Firstly, it is necessary to analyse the position of the Liberal Party in local government during the 1945–64 period. This is no easy task. The electoral politics of local government prior to reorganisation in 1974 have generally escaped academic analysis. Although analyses of local government politics in several towns and cities have been published,⁷³⁰ there exists no comprehensive national analysis along the lines of the work undertaken with regard to recent years by Rallings and Thrasher.⁷³¹ This Chapter begins, therefore, with a presentation of the results of research into the political composition of local authorities between 1945 and 1964, with a focus on the Liberal Party's position in local government during this period. The methodology used in the course of this research and the detailed findings are set out in an appendix to this chapter.

⁷³⁰ Examples include K. Newton, Second City Politics (Clarendon Press, 1976), A. Alexander, Borough Government and Politics: Reading 1835–1985 (George Allen & Unwin, 1985), and W. Hampton, Democracy and Community (Oxford University Press, 1970)

⁷³¹ For instance C. Rallings and M. Thrasher (eds.) Local Elections in Britain: A Statistical Digest (Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, 1993) which covers local election results and the composition of local authorities from 1974–92

The Liberal Party’s Local Government Position

ENGLAND AND WALES: BOROUGHES

Table 29: Liberal Councillors in English and Welsh Boroughs 1938–64

Year	Number of Liberal councillors	Proportion of Liberal councillors to total number of councillors
1938	1,022	9.02
1945	678	6.64
1946	421	4.08
1947	597	5.07
1949	495	4.00
1950	442	3.55
1951	410	3.30
1952	353	2.79
1953	315	2.54
1954	304	2.34
1955	328	2.46
1956	292	2.18
1957	304	2.26
1958	349	2.60
1959	379	2.83
1960	434	3.23
1961	519	3.85
1962	885	6.55
1963	967	7.14
1964	868	6.43

Table 29 shows that the number of Liberal members of borough councils in England and Wales more than halved as a result of the municipal elections of 1945 and 1946. There was

a significant improvement in the number of councillors in 1947, followed by a steady decline in numbers, interrupted only by a small improvement in 1955, until 1956. After 1956 the number of Liberal councillors in boroughs in England and Wales increased again, particularly in 1962, so that by 1963 the number had almost recovered its immediate pre-War level, only to fall back again in 1964.

It is also clear that throughout the 1945–64 period, Liberals constituted only a small proportion of the total number of councillors elected to borough councils in England and Wales. Even in 1963, the post-war high water mark, Liberal councillors represented only 7.14 per cent of the total, and there were six times more Labour than Liberal councillors. In the mid-1950s there were over fifteen times more Labour and Conservative councillors on such bodies than Liberal councillors.

In order to understand these trends it is necessary to consider the regional distribution of Liberal councillors and the relationship between the size of boroughs and the number of Liberal councillors elected to borough councils.

Table 30: Regional distribution of Liberal Members of Borough Councils in England and Wales

County/Region	Number of Liberal councillors in 1949	Number of Liberal councillors in 1956	Number of Liberal councillors in 1963
Lancashire	145	113	202
West Riding of Yorkshire	99	66	86
Cheshire	31	17	78
Middlesex	1	0	53
Essex	10	2	52
Surrey	0	0	41
Devon	15	6	39
Berkshire	0	2	35
Hampshire/Isle of Wight	5	2	34
Kent	0	0	30
Somerset	7	4	30
Wales	30	13	25
Warwickshire	4	4	25
Worcestershire	5	5	24
East Sussex	2	2	22
Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire	12	9	20
North Riding of Yorkshire and York	12	1	20
Gloucestershire	13	9	19
Staffordshire	9	0	15
Dorset	6	3	14
Wiltshire	1	4	13
Norfolk/Suffolk	14	5	12
Lincolnshire	24	8	11
Cambridgeshire/Huntingdonshire/ Isle of Ely/Soke of Peterborough	5	3	10
Leicestershire	5	1	10
West Sussex	0	0	10
Northamptonshire	8	4	9
Durham/Northumberland/Westmoreland/Cumberland	20	0	5
Oxfordshire	3	0	5
Buckinghamshire	1	4	4
Hertfordshire	0	0	4
Shropshire	2	4	4
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0	3
Herefordshire	5	1	2
Cornwall	1	0	1
Total	495	292	967

Table 30 illustrates the complex pattern of the Liberal Party’s decline and revival at local level between 1945 and 1964. In 1949, the first year for which an accurate total of the

number of Liberal borough councillors for England and Wales can be calculated,⁷³² 53.6 per cent of those councillors came from Lancashire, Cheshire or the West Riding of Yorkshire. 59.0 per cent of the remainder came from just eighteen boroughs where the Liberal group of councillors numbered more than five. Throughout England and Wales there were only twelve boroughs with ten or more Liberal councillors, all but two in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding, and these accounted for 37.8 per cent of the total number of Liberal members of borough councils in England and Wales.

Between 1949 and 1956, the Liberal Party became increasingly dependent on its Lancashire and Yorkshire heartlands for its strength in local government. In 1956, 67.1 per cent of Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales came from Lancashire, Cheshire or the West Riding of Yorkshire. Only six boroughs had more than ten Liberal councillors, all in Lancashire or the West Riding. Even in these heartlands, the Liberal Party's local government position was deteriorating. The number of Liberal borough councillors in the West Riding declined by one-third between 1949 and 1956, and that in Lancashire by over one-fifth over the same period. There were only six boroughs beyond these counties with Liberal groups comprising more than five councillors, and these accounted for 36.5 per cent of the remaining Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales.

The period from 1949 to 1956 was not one of uniform decline in the Liberals' local government base, however. The number of Liberal councillors increased in 26 boroughs in England and Wales during the period. The most significant increases were in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, particularly Blackpool, where the

⁷³² See the appendix to this Chapter

number of Liberal councillors doubled from six to twelve, Mossley, Pudsey, Wallasey and Fleetwood. These increases were more than offset by sharp declines in the number of Liberal councillors in traditionally Liberal boroughs such as Rochdale, Halifax and Huddersfield and by the ending of Liberal representation on 47 borough councils. In many cases, Liberal representation was already very low in 1949 and the further decline to 1956 was due to the death, retirement or defection of Liberal aldermen. As a consequence, several major provincial cities and county towns lost their last Liberal councillors by 1956, including Nottingham, Leicester, Liverpool, Worcester, Hereford, Salford, Oxford, Portsmouth, Durham and Northampton. Several significant Liberal groups, such as those in Middlesbrough, Darlington and Walsall, disappeared between 1949 and 1956 because they were finally subsumed in anti-Socialist alliances which, in some cases, dated back to the 1920s and 1930s.

Between 1956 and 1963 the regional distribution of Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales altered dramatically. The major change was the explosion of Liberal representation in the south east of England. The counties of Essex, Kent, Surrey, East and West Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Berkshire could between them muster eighteen Liberal borough councillors in 1949, eight in 1956, but 277 in 1963, representing 28.6 per cent of the national total. The proportion of Liberal borough councillors from Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire fell as a result, to 37.8 per cent in 1963, although there were 57.3 per cent more Liberal councillors in Lancashire and Cheshire in 1963 than in 1949.

As with the 1949–56 period, the pattern of change after 1956 was not uniform. Liberal representation fell in sixteen boroughs, including seven in which it disappeared altogether. Nine of these boroughs were in Lancashire, Cheshire or the West Riding of Yorkshire, including Halifax, Huddersfield and Rochdale. Table 30 also shows that there was virtually no change in the Liberal Party's position at local government level in some counties. Whereas the Liberals' local government base increased significantly in Berkshire, there was little change in neighbouring Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Similarly, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, where there were no Liberal borough councillors during the 1949–64 period, were virtually unaffected by the political changes which were noticeable in neighbouring counties. These variations could be observed further from the Home Counties. Liberal representation on borough councils in Worcestershire increased markedly between 1949–64, but there was little change in Herefordshire, with an increase in Liberal representation on Hereford City Council balanced out by the Liberals' disappearance from Leominster Borough Council.

Comparing the spread of Liberal borough councillors in 1963 with that in 1949, it is noticeable first that Liberals were represented on 87.9 per cent more borough councils in 1963 than fourteen years earlier. Nevertheless, even in 1963, there were Liberal councillors on only 200 boroughs in England and Wales; on over 200 boroughs there were no councillors who were elected as Liberals. Secondly, although it can be seen that there were fewer Liberal councillors in boroughs in the West Riding of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and the northern counties of England in 1963 than in 1949, and that the number of Liberal councillors in boroughs in the south east of England increased during this period, it would be unduly simplistic to conclude that there was a shift in the Liberal Party's local

government base from traditional centres of liberalism in the north of the country to new suburban bases in the south. Even in 1963, Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire remained the counties where the Liberals were strongest in local government. Of the 23 boroughs with more than ten Liberal councillors in 1963, twelve were in those three counties. That the Liberal Party developed its local government base very rapidly in some areas is undeniable. Of the 23 boroughs referred to above, five had no Liberal councillors in 1956 and a further eight had five or fewer. Nevertheless, it is significant that, of the twelve boroughs with ten or more Liberal councillors in 1949, only one had no Liberal representation in 1963 and only two had five or fewer Liberal councillors. Boroughs such as Southport, Rochdale, Halifax and Huddersfield returned significant numbers of Liberal councillors throughout the 1949–63 period.

Table 31: Relationship between the Size of Boroughs and the Number of Liberal Councillors⁷³³

Population of Boroughs (000s)	1949			1963		
	Number of boroughs	Number of Liberal councillors	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Number of boroughs	Number of Liberal councillors	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)
> 200	17	39	2.48	19	47	2.71
150–200	12	2	0.003	13	100	12.02
100–150	33	76	4.61	31	90	5.75
75–100	22	118	12.22	30	153	10.81
50–75	55	52	2.60	64	184	8.27
25–50	90	93	3.50	90	237	8.72
< 25	163	115	3.63	154	156	5.25
Total	392	495	3.90	401	967	7.18

⁷³³ The population figures are taken from the Municipal Year Book, 1950 and 1964

Table 31 shows that the Liberal Party was represented on borough councils in towns and cities of all sizes in both 1949 and 1964 and that the distribution of Liberal councillors according to the population of the towns in which they were located did not change significantly. In 1949 42.0 per cent of all Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales could be found in towns with populations of 50,000 or less; in 1963 that proportion was 40.6 per cent. Similarly, in 1949 23.6 per cent of all Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales were located in towns and cities with populations of over 100,000; that proportion had increased only slightly by 1963 to 24.5 per cent. The number of Liberal councillors in each population range increased between 1949 and 1963, although the number increased most substantially in two particular groups of boroughs. The first group comprised large towns with populations in 1963 of between 150,000 and 200,000. In towns such as Southend, Bolton, Ilford and Blackpool, where there had been virtually no Liberal councillors in 1949, there were large blocs of Liberal councillors in 1963. The second group comprised medium-sized towns with populations between 25,000 and 75,000 in 1963 where the numbers of Liberal councillors either grew substantially between 1949 and 1963, or where Liberal council groups came into being after 1949. There were a diverse range of towns in this group, including commuter and market towns in the south of England such as Richmond-upon-Thames, Aldershot, Maidenhead and Guildford; the suburbs of provincial cities, such as Eccles, Pudsey, Altrincham and Sale; seaside resorts such as Scarborough, Eastbourne and Torquay; and small towns on the fringes of urban areas such as Kidderminster and Rugby. Conversely, the number of Liberal councillors in very large and very small boroughs did not increase as markedly between 1949 and 1963 as did the number in these two categories.

Table 32: Relationship between Population Change and the Number of Liberal Borough Councillors

Change in the population of boroughs 1949–63 (%) ⁷³⁴	Number of boroughs	Number of Liberal councillors 1949	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Number of Liberal councillors 1963	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Change in number of Liberal councillors 1949–63 (%)
> 50	9	6	3.06	17	6.85	183.3
25–50	24	3	0.55	43	7.37	1333.3
10–25	85	72	3.03	205	8.24	184.7
0–10	143	214	4.30	314	6.18	46.7
< 0	131	200	4.14	373	7.68	86.5
Total	392	495	3.90	952 ⁷³⁵	7.18	92.3

Table 32 shows that the number of Liberal councillors increased most between 1949 and 1963 in those boroughs which increased in population by over ten per cent during that period. For the most part, the increases in the number of Liberal councillors in some of the fastest-growing boroughs resulted from the Liberals establishing footholds on councils after 1949, rather than existing Liberal council groups expanding in size. Again, these boroughs mostly comprised suburban towns such as Wanstead and Woodford, Hendon and Godalming; seaside towns such as Blackpool and Poole; and county towns within reach of major urban areas, such as Newbury, Lichfield and Maidenhead. The Liberals were not able to win substantial numbers of seats on the boroughs which increased most rapidly between 1945 and 1964, which included modern industrial towns such as Basingstoke, Dunstable and Romford. The boroughs whose populations declined between 1949 and 1963 included a number which were traditionally centres of Liberal local government

⁷³⁴ A small number of boroughs grew in size as a result of boundary changes, including the incorporation of Hoole UDC into Chester Borough Council in 1955 and the merger of the boroughs of Huntingdon and Godmanchester in 1961

⁷³⁵ Fifteen Liberal councillors were elected in 1963 for boroughs created after 1949 and therefore excluded from this table

activity and where Liberal representation on the council declined, including Rochdale, Heywood, Dukinfield, Middleton, Bacup and Bradford. Nevertheless, towns such as Huddersfield and Halifax, where Liberal representation also fell between 1949 and 1963, expanded in size and the Liberals gained council seats in towns such as Sale and Aldershot whose populations fell during this period.

ENGLAND AND WALES: URBAN DISTRICT COUNCILS

Details of the political composition of urban district councils were not published by the national press during the 1945–64 period. The Municipal Year Book did publish such data for the years from 1955 to 1958 and from 1960 to 1964, and Table 33 shows the numbers of UDC councillors belonging to each party in each of those years. The figures in Table 33 are less reliable than those in Table 29 (and in the appendix to this Chapter) because it has not been possible to cross-check data from the Municipal Year Book with newspaper reports and the party composition of a number of large UDCs, including Cheadle and Gatley in Cheshire and Banstead in Surrey, was infrequently or never published. Consequently, the total number of Liberal councillors shown in table 33 is likely to be underestimated by as much as fifteen or twenty in the later years.

Table 33: Councillors in England and Wales UDCs

Year	Total number of UDCs	UDCs for which results known	Number of Conservative councillors	Number of Labour councillors	Number of Liberal councillors	Number of other councillors
1955	567	502	1,550	2,900	69	3,611
1956	562	520	1,512	3,114	68	3,697
1957	563	506	1,422	3,100	73	3,600
1958	563	527	1,358	3,410	115	3,713
1959	564	0	not known	not known	not known	not known
1960	564	562	1,601	3,129	79	4,155
1961	564	529	1,667	2,988	246	3,730
1962	564	535	1,495	3,153	422	3,651
1963	564	544	1,400	3,433	525	3,544
1964	564	536	1,308	3,535	461	3,462

Table 33 shows a slightly different pattern for the change in the number of Liberal councillors between 1955 and 1964 from that in Table 29. The number of Liberal urban district councillors in 1960 was little more than in 1955, a noticeable increase in Liberal representation in 1958 having been reversed in 1959 and 1960. Indeed, the Liberal Party’s position on UDCs was in one way worse in 1960 than five years previously. In 1960, there were Liberal members of only seventeen UDCs, compared to 29 in 1955. After 1960, however, the number of Liberal members of UDCs increased dramatically, peaking in 1963. Even in 1963, however, only 5.6 per cent of UDC councillors recorded in the Municipal Year Book sat as Liberals.

Table 34: Regional distribution of Liberal Members of UDCs in England and Wales

County/Region	Number of Liberal councillors in 1955	Number of Liberal councillors in 1963
Lancashire	30	73
Cheshire	2	71
West Riding of Yorkshire	17	55
Kent	0	39
Surrey	0	39
Hertfordshire	0	33
Leicestershire	3	23
Middlesex	0	21
Hampshire/Isle of Wight	0	20
East Sussex	0	17
Staffordshire	3	15
Essex	0	15
Lincolnshire	0	13
Worcestershire	0	12
Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire	1	10
West Sussex	0	9
Huntingdonshire	0	7
Suffolk	0	7
Devon/Cornwall	1	6
Wales	7	5
Bedfordshire	0	5
North Riding of Yorkshire and York	0	5
Warwickshire	0	5
Somerset	0	4
Wiltshire	0	4
Buckinghamshire	0	3
Gloucestershire	0	3
Dorset	4	2
Durham	0	2
Shropshire	0	2
Berkshire	1	0
Total	69	525

The regional distribution of Liberal urban district councillors shown in Table 34 is comparable to that of Liberal borough councils in England and Wales, in Table 30. 71.0 per cent of Liberal UDC members were to be found in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1955. These counties continued to boast more Liberal UDC members than any other in 1963, although in that year they could claim only 37.9 per cent

of the total number of Liberal urban district councillors. As with borough councils in England and Wales, the increase in the number of Liberals on UDCs between 1955 and 1963 was most evident in south east England. There were no Liberal UDC members in Kent, Surrey, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, East and West Sussex, Kent, Hampshire or the Isle of Wight in 1955, but there were 193 such councillors eight years later. Nevertheless, the number of Liberal UDC members in other parts of southern England, including Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, barely changed between 1955 and 1963 and there were also large increases in the number of Liberal UDC members in north west England and the West Riding of Yorkshire, particularly in Cheshire.

Liberal representation on a handful of councils, including Saddleworth, Aireborough, Urmston and Colne Valley, increased dramatically between 1955 and 1963 but the increase in the number of Liberal members of UDCs was due primarily to a considerable increase in the number of UDCs on which Liberals were represented. The number of UDCs with Liberal members jumped from 29 in 1955 to 151 in 1963, before falling back to 143 in 1964. Even in 1963, however, there remained around 500 UDCs without Liberal councillors.

Table 35: Relationship between the Size of UDCs and the Number of Liberal Councillors⁷³⁶

Population of UDCs (000s)	1955			1963		
	Number of UDCs	Number of Liberal councillors	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Number of UDCs	Number of Liberal councillors	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)
> 50	17	0	0	26	70	10.67
25–50	76	8	0.45	89	142	7.61
10–25	202	35	1.24	204	270	8.28
< 10	272	26	0.80	245	43	1.34
Total	567	69	0.83	564	525	6.32

Table 35 shows that, in 1955, Liberal representation on UDCs was confined almost entirely to towns with populations under 25,000. There were no Liberal councillors on the largest UDCs, mostly in suburban areas of south east England. There were more Liberal councillors on both large and small UDCs in 1963, but the biggest increases were on larger UDCs, such as Orpington, Woking, Harlow and Brentwood. This reflected the change in the geographical spread of Liberal representation in local government. The Liberal revival hardly touched the smallest UDCs.

⁷³⁶ Population figures are taken from the Municipal Year Book, 1956 and 1964

Table 36: Relationship between Population Change and the Number of Liberal Urban District Councillors

Change in the population of UDCs 1955–63 (%)	Number of UDCs	Number of Liberal councillors 1955	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Number of Liberal councillors 1963	Proportion of Liberals to total number of councillors (%)	Change in number of Liberal councillors 1955–63 (%)
> 50	25	0	0	51	12.41	-
25–50	58	2	0.23	107	11.52	5250.0
10–25	123	6	0.32	172	9.28	2766.7
0–10	205	30	1.02	115	3.64	283.3
0	9	7	6.73	0	0	-100.0
< 0	142	24	1.12	75	3.47	212.5
Total	562 ⁷³⁷	69	0.84	520 ⁷³⁸	6.03	653.6

Table 36 shows even more clearly than Table 32 that the Liberal Party’s advance in local government in the late 1950s and early 1960s was achieved most spectacularly in areas of population expansion, particularly towns within commuting distance of London, such as Potters Bar, Brentwood, and Bushey; Manchester, such as Cheadle and Gatley and Marple; and Liverpool, particularly the Wirral. These were all areas where the Labour Party was weak and the Liberals were able to establish themselves as the principal challengers to the Conservatives, first in local government and then, in places such as Cheadle, in parliamentary elections. In some high-growth towns where the Labour Party was well organised, such as Stevenage and Basildon, the Liberals made little headway.

⁷³⁷ Five UDCs became boroughs in 1955 but none of them had Liberal councillors at that time

⁷³⁸ Five councillors were elected in 1963 for UDCs created after 1955 which have been excluded from this Table

Most rural district councils were not divided on party lines. Councillors representing either of the main political parties were elected to 87 of the 475 RDCs in 1955, and on only 34 of these authorities were both Conservative and Labour councillors to be found. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the number of RDCs with Liberal councillors was low during the period from 1955 to 1964, when the information about the political complexion of such authorities was published in the Municipal Year Book, as Table 37 shows.

Table 37: Liberal Members of Rural District Councils 1955–64⁷³⁹

Year	Number of RDCs with Liberal councillors	Number of Liberal councillors
1955	1	1
1956	4	6
1957	4	6
1960	1	4
1961	6	10
1962	17	40
1963	17	42
1964	20	59

Table 37 shows that, as was the case with borough councils in England and Wales, Liberal representation on RDCs increased considerably in the early 1960s. The distribution of the increase in the Liberal Party’s representation on RDCs mirrored the changes which occurred between 1956 and 1964 on borough and urban district councils. In 1955 the sole recorded Liberal rural district councillor could be found, appropriately enough, in Hawarden, formerly the home of W. E. Gladstone. Six Liberals were recorded on

⁷³⁹ The political composition of RDCs was missing from the 1958 and 1959 editions of the Municipal Year Book

Hawarden RDC in 1956 and 1957, and Liberals could also be found at Wigton, Cumberland; Tetbury, Gloucestershire; and Meriden, Warwickshire. After 1960, Liberals were elected for the first time to a number of RDCs in the south of England, including Godstone, Sevenoaks, Dartford, Dorking and Horley, Elstree and St Albans in the London commuter belt and Newbury and Wokingham, where success in RDC elections followed success in borough elections. The Liberals were also successful in a number of other RDCs which were close to major urban areas and were likely to have contained considerable numbers of commuters, such as Disley and Tintwistle (both on the outskirts of the Greater Manchester area), Plympton St Mary (Plymouth) and Seisdon (Wolverhampton).

ENGLAND AND WALES: COUNTY COUNCILS

The results of elections to county councils in England and Wales were not recorded as comprehensively as those to borough councils between 1945 and 1964. Results in only a handful of councils were reported in The Times in 1946 and 1955. The veracity of some of the results reported may also be doubted. For instance, two different breakdowns of the party composition of Leicestershire County Council were published within two days of the 1961 county council elections. Too much reliance should not be placed on all of the figures in Table 38, which shows the party composition of county councils in England and Wales between 1949 and 1964. Unlike with English and Welsh boroughs, estimates of the party composition for missing councils has not been attempted because of the length of time between county council elections and the disproportionate impact inaccurate estimates might have on the total figures shown, given the small number of county councils.

Nevertheless, the assessment presented of the total Liberal strength on county councils in England and Wales is probably reasonably accurate.

Table 38: Councillors in England and Wales County Councils (excluding London)
1949–64

	Total councils	Total councillors	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Other
1949	53	3391	772	689	73	1857
1952	61	3906	806	1195	74	1831
1958	54	3384	711	1020	63	1590
1961	59	3841	956	948	83	1854
1964	38	2346	440	654	69	1183

Table 38 shows that county councils were dominated by independent councillors to a far greater extent during this period than borough councils. A large number of rural councils were almost entirely represented by independents between 1949 and 1964. The table also shows that, although the number of Liberal county councillors did appear to be higher in 1961 and 1964 than in earlier years, the increase was not dramatic. In 1949, it was recorded that Liberals were represented on ten county councils — Flintshire, Brecknockshire, Merionethshire, Northamptonshire, Cheshire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Denbighshire and Kent. Fifty-two of the 73 councillors recorded sat on the first three, Welsh, authorities. It is questionable how many of these councillors actually stood as Liberals, rather than were content to be described as Liberal once elected on non-party tickets.⁷⁴⁰

⁷⁴⁰ See p267 about Liberal councillors in Flintshire

In 1964 Liberals were elected to a far larger proportion of county councils than previously — nineteen of 38. On only four councils, however, were five or more Liberals elected. These were Flintshire and Brecknockshire, centres of Liberal activity in 1949, Leicestershire and Warwickshire. There were five county councils with a solitary Liberal representative.

LONDON

There was no Liberal representation on London's borough councils after the Second World War until 1962, when twelve Liberals were elected across London — four in Stoke Newington, three in Battersea and Hampstead, and two in Stepney. By 1964, when London's system of local government was reorganised, there was a further Liberal councillor, in Shoreditch.⁷⁴¹

London's parliamentary constituencies each constituted a ward for the purposes of elections to the London County Council (LCC). In 1937, the Liberal Party contested nine of the 62 wards, mostly in the inner city boroughs, and came close to victory only in Bethnal Green South West. There were two Liberal victors in this ward in 1946, including the former MP for the area, Sir Percy Harris, and he was again victorious in 1949. There were no Conservative candidates in Bethnal Green in either year, however, and the Liberals contested just three wards in total in 1946 (although two wards were contested by National Liberal candidates) and only two wards in 1949. Sir Percy Harris retired in 1952 and the Liberal candidates for the Bethnal Green seat on the LCC were crushed in the

⁷⁴¹ Local Government Newsletter (LPO, No. 16. Aug 63)

elections that year. The Liberal Party never again came close to winning a seat on the LCC, although the number of wards fought by the Party increased to ten in 1958 and 23 in 1961.

Elections to the councils of the new, larger London boroughs took place in 1964. These authorities encompassed several borough and urban district councils on which the Liberals had previously polled well, including West Ham, Orpington and Finchley. 168 Liberal borough and urban district councillors were members of the authorities within the new Greater London area in 1964, but only sixteen Liberals were elected to Greater London borough councils in 1964 — seven in Bromley (which included Orpington), six in Barnet (which included Finchley) and three in Newham (which included West Ham). Each Greater London Borough formed a ward for the purposes of elections to the new Greater London Council. Liberal candidates stood in every borough bar Greenwich, Haringey, Lewisham and Southwark but none came within 18,000 votes of victory.

SCOTLAND

The period from 1945 to 1964 was one of significant, but modest, change in the Liberal Party's involvement in local elections in Scotland, as Table 39 shows.

Table 39: Liberal Candidates and Councillors in Scotland 1945–64

	Liberal candidates in local elections	Liberal councillors
1945	0	0
1946	0	0
1947	2	0
1949	0	0
1950	1	0
1951	0	0
1952	0	0
1953	2	2
1954	0	2
1955	2	2
1956	2	2
1957	2	3
1958	2	2
1959	3	2
1960	5	2
1961	22	8
1962	44	14
1963	53	16
1964	31	14

Before 1961 the Liberal Party was almost wholly absent from the local government scene north of the border. Only in Alloa and Alva, both small Clackmannanshire towns, were lone Liberals elected to burgh councils in the ten years from 1945. The number of Liberal local election candidates in Scotland exploded after 1961. A major factor in this change was the increasing involvement of Edinburgh Liberals in the city’s local elections. Liberals

fought local elections in Edinburgh sporadically — there were two candidates in 1947 and one in 1955 — but a serious strategy for contesting them began to emerge after 1956, when Lady Morton contested the Newington ward. She polled well in a straight fight against a Progressive and went on to win the seat the next year. The Liberals withdrew from election contests in the city until 1960, when Morton retained her seat and two other candidates stood, but in 1961 there were seven Liberal candidates, including a victor in Corstophine ward. There were twelve candidates in 1962, with the Liberals winning three seats; nineteen in 1963, with one winner; and ten unsuccessful Liberals in 1964. The Liberal Party also began contesting elections in a small number of larger boroughs on a more systematic basis after 1961, including Greenock, Dumbarton, Kirkcaldy, Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, Kilmarnock, Perth, Ayr and Rutherglen and fought occasional contests in smaller boroughs such as Saltcoats, Largs, Brechin, Tranent, Fort William, Prestwick, Cumnock and Stevenston. Except in Greenock, as will be seen below, Liberal candidates were very rarely successful at this time and there were no Liberal candidates in the vast majority of burgh elections between 1945 and 1964.

The results of Scottish county council elections were not comprehensively reported before 1964. The Scotsman reported just one unsuccessful Liberal candidate in county council elections during the 1945–64 period, at Giffnock, Renfrewshire, in 1961.

CONCLUSION

The geographical distribution of the Liberal Party's strength at local government level between 1945 and 1964 was very different from that at parliamentary level. Whereas most

of the Liberal MPs from this period represented constituencies in the UK's Celtic fringe, the Party's local government heartland was Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. It was in these counties that Liberal representation on municipal authorities survived during the first half of the 1950s, when it disappeared from almost everywhere else in the UK. Pacts and informal arrangements with other parties (particularly the Conservative Party) helped retain sizeable Liberal presences on local authorities in these counties; traditional social structures in small towns such as Bacup and Mossley also bolstered the Liberals' position. The Liberal Party was unable to translate its relatively strong local government position in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire into victories in parliamentary elections at this time, because it won few council seats consistently in three-cornered contests and was usually organised only in parts of, rather than throughout, constituencies.

Between 1945 and 1955 Liberal representation was ended on a large number of English and Welsh local authorities, particularly in major cities. This often reflected the continuation of pre-war electoral trends. On many councils, the only Liberals remaining after 1945 were aldermen or councillors kept in place by informal arrangements with the Conservative Party. The death, defection or retirement of these representatives led to the final eclipse of the Liberal Party in many districts, but, often, this came ten or twenty years after the last victory by a Liberal candidate in a local government election. In Scotland, Liberal representation at local authority level had already been ended by 1945.

The revival of Liberal activity at local government level after 1955, and particularly in the early 1960s, was an English phenomenon. There was no revival in Wales and, with one or

two notable exceptions, the Liberal Party made little headway in local elections in Scotland. The English revival was primarily in suburban areas and small and medium-sized towns, particularly in south east England. The Liberal Party did particularly well in local elections in the London commuter belt — including areas such as Orpington, Finchley, Friern Barnet and Southend. Other areas of commuter development — such as the small towns and villages south of Manchester — were also fertile territory for the Liberal Party. These areas were generally Conservative strongholds in which the Labour Party was poorly organised. The Liberals were able to position themselves as the credible alternatives to the Conservatives, using vigorous campaigning on local issues to forge a distinctive image and to shake up the complacent Conservative establishment, factors acknowledged by the Conservative Party at that time.⁷⁴²

The Liberals made little impact in cities at this time, although Liberals were returned to Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham City Councils and were particularly successful in Edinburgh and West Ham. A common factor which restricted the growth of Liberal representation in large cities and on county councils was the size of wards. The Liberal Party tended to be most successful in towns with small wards, where its small campaign teams (or individual candidates) could be most effective. Larger wards were more difficult to fight successfully with limited resources. Liberal representation in rural areas was also held back by the Party's reluctance to challenge the sway of independent councillors, some of whom were undoubtedly Liberal Party members or supporters.

⁷⁴² Conservative Party Papers, "Liberals in the North West Area", 4 Oct 61, and "Liberal Revival" (Report from the Home Counties North Area Conservative Party) 24 Oct 61, reference CCO500/15/3

Table 40: Liberal Councils

	Number of councils with Liberal majority	Number of councils where Liberals were largest (or joint largest) party
1945	0	2
1947	1	3
1949	2	5
1950	1	5
1951	1	5
1952	0	4
1953	1	2
1954	0	4
1955	0	4
1956	0	5
1957	1	5
1958	2	6
1959	1	5
1960	1	8
1961	4	12
1962	7	12
1963	9	26
1964	5	18

Table 40 shows that, even at the Party’s lowest ebb, there were local authorities on which Liberal councillors formed a majority or were the largest group. These authorities were mostly in the Party’s local government heartland in north west England and the West Riding of Yorkshire — including Halifax, Huddersfield and Rochdale, and also Haslingden, Dukinfield and Bacup. In the early 1960s Liberal councillors formed a majority or were the largest group on several more north west England or Yorkshire local authorities including Hazel Grove and Bramhall, Bredbury and Romiley, Baildon and Pudsey. For the first time, however, the Liberal Party became the dominant influence on councils in south east England, including Orpington, Potters Bar, Maidenhead, Friern Barnet, Aldershot and East Grinstead. This represented a major change in the Liberal

Party's electoral base, a clean break from the years of decline before 1955, and one which was to help enhance the Party's credibility in parliamentary elections in the future.

Liberal Attitudes to Local Government Elections

ROLE OF PARTIES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Liberals exhibited a number of attitudes towards the role of their Party in local government elections and on local authorities. A common argument was that there was no place for party politics in local government.⁷⁴³ A number of prominent Liberals, including Aubrey Herbert, of the LCA, and Brian Ashmore, who contested the general elections of 1959 and 1964 as a Liberal, sat on local authorities as independents.⁷⁴⁴ They argued that political parties had no distinctive contribution to make to municipal issues, such as waste disposal and town planning, and that the intervention of parties in local elections reduced the range and quality of candidates standing for election. A variation of this attitude could be found in Flintshire, where party labels were used in local elections but Flintshire East LA asserted that all Liberal candidates paid their own expenses and received no help from the Liberal organisation.⁷⁴⁵ There is also evidence of LA involvement in the local election campaigns

⁷⁴³ For example, see A. S. Henbury's post-war Liberal programme for Birmingham, in "For Every Citizen — the Birmingham Liberal Digest" (Birmingham Liberal Party, 1956–57) Baker Papers, and for related discussions see Littleborough LA, Minutes, 16 Mar 51 and Godstone LA, Minutes, 28 Feb 61

⁷⁴⁴ For further evidence of Liberals standing as independent candidates in local elections see Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 19 May 51, Newbury LA, Papers, "Ad Lib", Newbury LA members' magazine, Jul 62, and LPO Organising Committee, Papers, "Initial Report on Rotherham Liberal Association", K. Powell, 1 Nov 62, and "Swansea East", P. Kemmis, 28 Jan 63, LSE file 5/2, pp140, 184

⁷⁴⁵ Chester Chronicle, 21 Jan 61

of Liberals standing as independents and, in Penrith and the Border, of a formal role for district LAs in finding independent candidates who were Liberals.⁷⁴⁶

As we have seen, this attitude was prevalent in district and county councils in England and Wales and more generally in Scotland. Nor was this attitude peculiar to the Liberal Party. Conservatives too often argued against party involvement in local elections, and blamed the Labour Party for politicising local authorities. Conservatives in the Hexham constituency were dismayed at the determination of some Liberals to contest local elections there on a party basis in the early 1960s.⁷⁴⁷ The Liberal Party's Local Government Handbook of 1960 stated that "the origin of any form of national organisation in local government seems to have been the joint ILP/Fabian Society Local Government Information Bureau which was started in the 1890s".⁷⁴⁸ Bulpitt, while acknowledging that Labour introduced party politics to a number of councils, has challenged this view and emphasised the extent to which local authorities were often polarised on party political lines in the nineteenth century.⁷⁴⁹

There was an increasing recognition within the Liberal Party of the need to challenge the rise of Labour at local government level and to bring the Party more regularly and

⁷⁴⁶ Cumberland North LA, Minutes, 11 Aug 45, 27 Oct 45, Penrith and the Border LA, Minutes, 29 Jan 49, 4 Jul 53, 19 Feb 55, 22 Feb 58, 9 Apr 60, 4 Mar 61, 11 May 61, Bradford-on-Avon LA, Minutes, 21 Apr 53, Dunfermline LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 49, Harwich LA, Minutes, 15 Aug 55, and Surrey East LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 56; and for expressions of moral support see Cambridgeshire LA, Minutes, 24 Nov 45

⁷⁴⁷ Interview, Lavinia Orde

⁷⁴⁸ Local Government Handbook (LPO, 1960) p24

⁷⁴⁹ J. G. Bulpitt, Party Politics in Local Government (Longmans, 1967) pp6–9 and see Hampstead LA, Minutes, 29 May 47. Young has written that "the Conservative account of the rise of party in local government is untenable" — K. Young, Local Politics and the Rise of Party (Leicester University Press, 1975) p219

prominently to the attention of electors.⁷⁵⁰ As early as 1937 the Liberal Party Assembly called for “liberalism to be applied effectively in local administration by Liberal candidates independent of either of the other parties”.⁷⁵¹ The Scottish Liberal Party passed a motion in 1952 which called for Liberals to contest local elections more vigorously,⁷⁵² similar in form to a resolution of the London Liberal Party in 1947.⁷⁵³ Such resolutions often reflected a reluctant acceptance of the need for the Party to become embroiled in local elections, rather than an enthusiastic change of direction, and mechanisms for them to be translated into action by the national party were not developed. A number of Liberals defended the Party’s reluctance to contest local elections in some areas on the grounds that many, or most, independent councillors were Liberals,⁷⁵⁴ although such assertions were disputed.⁷⁵⁵ There are examples of tensions arising from Liberals standing as independents,⁷⁵⁶ which sometimes reflected generational divisions within Liberal

⁷⁵⁰ See Esslemont Papers, memorandum on organisation, J. Thompson, undated (pre-1950?): “Liberals should endeavour to get into local ward committees, and town and county councils, and should fight as Liberals propagating a Liberal policy for local affairs, as is done in England. The unholy coalition of Liberals and Tories in town and county councils has only made the Labour Party stronger” (reference MS3037/3/7/5)

⁷⁵¹ Local Government Handbook, p24

⁷⁵² Annual Report, SLP, 1952–3 (resolution proposed by Glasgow Pollok LA); this policy had been advocated previously by Philip Fothergill on the Scottish Liberal Federation’s Executive Committee, Minutes, 21 Nov 45

⁷⁵³ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 8 Nov 47

⁷⁵⁴ Interviews, Roderic Bowen, Peter Cocks, John Cornwall, James Davidson, T. R. L. Fraser, William Hosking, Chris Trethewey; see also Hampstead LA, Minutes, 9 Apr 47

⁷⁵⁵ Interviews, Paul Tyler, Cyril Rose

⁷⁵⁶ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 12 Oct 57 (dispute in Hereford), Harwich LA, Minutes, 1 May 59, 5 Jun 59 (dispute at Frinton-on-Sea), Stratford-upon-Avon LA, Minutes, 5 Jul 55, 9 Apr 56, 11 May 56 (dispute involving the LA’s secretary) and F. Bealey, J. Blondel and W. P. McCann, Constituency Politics: Society Today and Tomorrow (Faber and Faber, 1965) pp346–7 (concerning the President of Newcastle-under-Lyme LA in 1950 who was an independent councillor)

associations.⁷⁵⁷ As late as 1960 the Liberal Party's official guidance was that Liberals should stand under their party banner in local government only when other parties did likewise and that there was no need for long-standing Liberals sitting as independent councillors to adopt a party label.⁷⁵⁸

ANTI-SOCIALIST ALLIANCES

Another approach to local elections, of declining significance during the 1945–64 period, was that Liberals should forge formal or informal anti-Socialist alliances. During the inter-war period Liberals and Conservatives had joined together at local government level to form Progressive or Municipal associations in many towns and cities in Scotland, northern England and elsewhere, and these were mostly still active after 1945.⁷⁵⁹ The involvement of Liberals on these associations appears to have been extremely limited in the post-war era, however. Edinburgh Progressive Association tried to recruit prominent local Liberals in the early 1950s in order to ensure that it was not entirely dominated by Conservatives,⁷⁶⁰ and similar concerns were apparent in its Glasgow counterpart at the same time.⁷⁶¹ The Liberal attitude to these organisations was, after 1945, ambivalent. One Glasgow Liberal frankly acknowledged, in 1950, that Liberals could not be elected to the city council unless

⁷⁵⁷ Interview, Barbara Moon; however, an amendment to a NLYL conference motion on local government elections in 1949 proposed by Esher YLs deplored the intervention of parties — NLYL 38th Annual Conference, Programme and Agenda, 1949

⁷⁵⁸ Local Government Handbook, pp24–5; this reflected the terms of a resolution of the Liberal Party Council of 11 Jun 49

⁷⁵⁹ The Municipal association in Reading was formed by Conservatives without Liberal involvement, however — Blondel, “The Political Structure of Reading”, pp97–8 and see Alexander Reading 1835–1985

⁷⁶⁰ Interview, J. G. Gray

⁷⁶¹ SLP Executive Committee, Minutes, 29 Nov 50

they stood under the Progressive banner and the Executive Committee of the Scottish Liberal Party endorsed this approach.⁷⁶² Robert Bainbridge, leader of the Progressive group on South Shields Borough Council and a Progressive Mayor of the town, was a member of the LPO Executive Committee for several post-war years as a representative of the Northern Counties Liberal Federation. In later years, however, younger Liberals increasingly regarded the members of Progressive and related associations as Conservatives masquerading as independents and challenged them at the ballot box. Liberals played a prominent role in the decline of the Progressive associations in several places after 1955, including Edinburgh, Greenock and Doncaster.⁷⁶³

Alliances between the Conservative and Liberal Parties were common at local government level between 1945 and 1964, particularly in the early part of this period.⁷⁶⁴ These were rarely formal, in the sense of being underpinned by agreements signed by representatives of both Parties.⁷⁶⁵ Instead, they generally took the form of informal understandings at local level that the two Parties would not fight each other. Often, certain wards would be left to one or other Party to fight for historical reasons.⁷⁶⁶ Bulpitt found evidence of such

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Interviews, J. G. Gray, James Boyd; Local Government Newsletter (LPO, May 63) (re. Doncaster)

⁷⁶⁴ Liberal/Labour alliances were unusual, although there were unofficial arrangements between the parties in Bury (Interview, Chris Foote Wood) and Southport (M. J. Braham, Southport Liberal Association: the first 100 years (M. J. Braham, 1985) pp55, 61, 63–4) and they were discussed by Hampstead LA, Minutes, 13 Dec 55 and Leeds North Ward LA, Minutes, 7 Mar 50

⁷⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the President of Hampstead LA in the mid-1950s was also a Conservative and Municipal Reform borough councillor — Hampstead LA, Minutes, 29 May 47; and a formal arrangement between the Conservative and Liberal Parties gave Conservative candidates free runs against Labour in local elections in Coventry in 1953, 1954 and 1955 — see N. Tiratsso, Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry 1945–60 (Routledge, 1990) pp90, 93, 98

⁷⁶⁶ For example see Chester Chronicle, 8 Jul 61, for a Liberal candidate in Chester signing the nomination papers of a Conservative candidate

arrangements in several boroughs in north west England during the 1955–60 period and informal Conservative/Liberal pacts were also to be found in Yorkshire. The Liberals on West Riding County Council were annexed to the Conservative group in all but name from 1952, and an attempt by a Liberal to break the electoral understanding between the Parties was met with “embarrassment” by the Liberal group.⁷⁶⁷ Another manifestation of cooperation between the Conservative and Liberal Parties at local government level was the support sometimes offered to Liberal aldermen by Conservative councillors long after the defeat of the last Liberal councillors. In this way, Liberal representation was maintained on a larger number of councils than would otherwise have been the case.

Barber and Beresford, in their history of West Riding County Council, noted that the arrangement between Conservatives and Liberals on that authority “faded away gradually” because it “proved much less attractive to the next generation of Liberal members”.⁷⁶⁸ Informal arrangements elsewhere met with the same fate for similar reasons, especially after the Liberal Party contested the Bolton East parliamentary by-election and signalled the end of the parliamentary Conservative/Liberal pacts in Bolton and Huddersfield. Conflict between older and younger Liberals on local authorities was rare, however. In many places, the last Liberals to benefit from cooperation with the Conservative Party had died or resigned before younger Liberals, keen to take on the Conservatives, emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Elsewhere, the remaining Conservative-backed Liberal aldermen were too old or too distant from the local Liberal association to challenge the new strategic direction of the younger generation. In a few places, such as Huddersfield,

⁷⁶⁷ The West Riding County Council 1889–1974, B. J. Barber and M. W. Beresford (West Yorkshire Metropolitan Borough Council, 1979) p169

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

where an electoral arrangement between the Conservative and Liberal Parties had been forged at parliamentary as well as local government level and where there was a large Liberal council group, and Rochdale, there was conflict between older and younger Liberals about the relationship between the Conservative and Liberal Parties, but not to such an extent that local pacts were broken before 1964.⁷⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

Liberal associations were primarily engaged with preparations to contest parliamentary elections during the 1945–64 period. Local elections, when contested, tended to be regarded as a peripheral activity, unconnected with LAs' main mission. Few LAs had developed a strategy for fighting local elections, although some exceptions shall be considered below. LA executive committee minutes record several complaints about meeting dates clashing with the dates of local government elections;⁷⁷⁰ rarely was a specific budget earmarked for local government elections, and candidates were often required to fund their own expenses;⁷⁷¹ and although some Liberals thought that local election victories might pave the way to success in parliamentary elections,⁷⁷² few took seriously the possibility of a significant link between the success of the Party at local government level

⁷⁶⁹ Interviews, Cyril Smith, Marjorie Barton

⁷⁷⁰ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 5 Apr 63, North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 20 May 60, Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 23 Jun 49

⁷⁷¹ See pp150–3

⁷⁷² Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 10 Mar 52, Leeds South LA, Minutes, 5 Oct 51, Wood Street Ward LA (Walthamstow) Minutes, 22 Feb 49, and Southport LA, Organisation Sub-committee, Minutes, 28 Aug 51

and its impact in parliamentary elections.⁷⁷³ Liberal involvement in local government elections often depended upon the willingness of a handful of individuals to stand for election year after year, usually with little more than token backing from the LA.⁷⁷⁴

Many Liberal councillors and activists were assiduous and dedicated servants of their local communities. A number claimed that they practised what later came to be described as ‘community politics’ by seeking out and responding to the often mundane issues raised by electors.⁷⁷⁵ Hampstead LA, for example, ran a “Can I Help You?” advice service from its headquarters in the early 1950s and a similar scheme was operated at the same time in Southport;⁷⁷⁶ Liberals in Bognor Regis and Croydon advocated involving local people in discussions of policy proposals that affected them and regular reports back by councillors to their electors;⁷⁷⁷ and Wilfrid Roberts, when MP for Cumberland North, led quarterly meetings in Wigton at which electors could question their elected representatives.⁷⁷⁸ Aspects of that approach to local politics can be found in the election material of Sir Percy Harris. When standing for the London County Council in 1946, he issued leaflets which invited electors to submit their detailed local problems and concerns to him under the slogan “always let your representatives know what you want” and advertised a Liberal

⁷⁷³ For instance, Interviews Richard Holme and Jeremy Thorpe: local elections were sometimes described as a waste of time in LA records — Walthamstow West LA, Minutes, 3 Apr 50, 1 Apr 52 and Wood Street Ward LA (Walthamstow) 3 Jan 50 — or regarded as a training ground for general elections — Faversham LA, Minutes, 27 Mar 62, Lewisham North LA, Minutes, 18 Mar 52, and Peckham LA, Minutes, 5 Apr 49

⁷⁷⁴ Stanley Needoff fought seventeen local election contests in Manchester before being elected, to serve a brief period on the city council, in 1962

⁷⁷⁵ Interviews, Cyril Smith, Neva Orrell, Arthur Holt

⁷⁷⁶ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 25 Oct 50, 5 Jul 54, and Southport LA, Minutes, 2 Jul 51

⁷⁷⁷ Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 26 Feb 49, 16 May 49, 13 Jun 49; Croydon Liberal Papers, election address of J. Stevenson, Liberal local election candidate in Croydon, 1949

⁷⁷⁸ Cumberland North, Minutes, 28 Jan 47

advice centre.⁷⁷⁹ The development of ideas and practices such as these played an important role in the revival of the Liberal Party at local government level during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Local Government Revival — Case Studies

INTRODUCTION

The data presented above shows that the number of Liberal councillors began to increase from the mid-1950s onwards and that the improvement in the Party's position at local government elections was uneven. In some areas, the Liberals quickly became a major force in local government before 1964, whereas in others, the Liberals were no better placed in 1964 than twenty years previously. The improvements which occurred were due entirely to the efforts of local activists rather than the Liberal federations or the Party's headquarters. In a number of towns Liberals reassessed their approach to local government elections during the 1950s and early 1960s and recognised that the chances of success in parliamentary elections would be increased if local elections were fought more regularly and professionally. New election techniques were developed to help enhance the Liberal Party's electoral credibility and to reflect many Liberals' attitudes towards the role of elected representatives. The Liberal Party's headquarters became aware of these new developments in the early 1960s and played a major role in propagating them more widely, but it followed the lead of small numbers of activists in a small number of places who between them redefined the strategic direction of the Party.

⁷⁷⁹ Bethnal Green Liberal Papers, "Bethnal Green Special", 7 Mar 46

RUGBY

Perhaps the first place in which Liberals began to focus on fighting local elections to revive the Party's fortunes was Rugby, Warwickshire. There had been a Liberal tradition in the Rugby constituency based on the town's railway workers and the Liberal leanings of landowners in the villages in the south of the constituency, but this had faded during the inter-war years.⁷⁸⁰ A Liberal MP was elected in 1923, but otherwise Rugby elected a Conservative to Parliament at every general election from 1918 to 1935. There was no Liberal candidate in the 1935 general election and the Labour Party had assumed the position of principal challenger to the Conservatives, particularly in local elections in Rugby itself. Liberals took some encouragement from the election of an independent, W. J. Brown, as the town's MP in a wartime by-election, and his even more surprising re-election in 1945. Brown, a former Labour MP, had some sympathy with the Liberal Party and received the backing of Clement Davies in the 1950 general election.⁷⁸¹

Like many Liberal associations in the early 1950s, Rugby LA was an organisation which had clearly seen better days. It had not contested an election of any sort for many years and was kept alive by a hard core of middle-aged, mainly middle-class, professionals who engaged in a fairly active programme of social activities, particularly whist drives. The LA was lucky enough to hire rooms, as a result of income derived from shares held in the Rugby Liberal Club Company Ltd, which no longer ran a club, but owned property in the town.

⁷⁸⁰ H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections (Macmillan, 1967) p197

⁷⁸¹ Interview, Peter Barrass and Rugby LA, Minutes, 19 Jul 48, on contact between Brown and officers of the LA, and 29 Mar 50, for Davies's support for Brown

Rugby's Young Liberals were responsible for reinvigorating the LA, primarily by developing a strategy for contesting local elections. John Kilroy was the first Liberal to contest a local election in Rugby for over fifteen years when he finished third in the North East ward in 1950.⁷⁸² His candidature, and subsequent recruitment work at the British Thomson-Houston engineering firm, brought other young people into the Liberal Party.⁷⁸³ A Young Liberal association was formed in July 1950 and immediately set up a Social Committee and a Political Committee, both of which, one YLA member said, "contributed to a sudden growth in [Liberal] membership, influence and identity in the town".⁷⁸⁴

From the outset, the YLA pushed the LA Executive Committee to contest local elections on a more coordinated basis. A paper submitted by three prominent YLA members to the LA Executive Committee in August 1952 argued that local election contests required careful planning in order to be successful. It began "from now on we must contest local elections regularly and we must plan all campaigns at least six months ahead if possible. We are of the opinion that it is absolutely futile to put up a candidate in a three-cornered contest without sufficient preparation. Previous contests have shown us that we are unlikely to obtain more than twenty per cent of the votes if we conduct the campaign in the manner we have used previously".⁷⁸⁵ The paper went on to set out a timetable for local election campaigns, beginning with candidate selection and a first election leaflet in the September, and some campaigning ideas. These were not radical, and some, such as

⁷⁸² Kilroy was adopted on 3 April 1950, after it had been decided on 18 January 1950 not to contest the local elections because no suitable candidates could be found, Rugby LA, Minutes, 18 Jan 50, 3 Apr 50

⁷⁸³ Interview, Peter Barrass and Rugby LA, Papers, Executive Committee's Report, 1949–50

⁷⁸⁴ Rugby LA, Minutes, 24 Jul 50 and Interview, Peter Barrass

⁷⁸⁵ Rugby LA, Papers, "Local Elections", a report by P. Barrass, P. Turner and D. Gee, Aug 52

weekly whist drives and street corner meetings, would have appealed to even the most staid members of the Executive Committee. Most importantly, the Young Liberals emphasised that a ward committee was required to organise each local campaign and that ward committees should receive financial assistance from the constituency LA.

The Young Liberals' report was accepted and an election committee was formed in September 1952.⁷⁸⁶ It proved more difficult to organise local election campaigns than had been anticipated, however, particularly as the LA lacked active members. Although it was immediately decided to fight one ward in 1953 a candidate, for South West ward, was not adopted until January 1953 and he finished a disappointing third. Two Young Liberals, Derek Gee in East ward and Peter Turner in South West ward, stood in 1954, but canvassing did not get under way until January 1954. Whereas £50 was spent by the LA on the single election contest in 1953, as recommended by Gee et al. in 1952, only £51 was spent on the two election fights in 1954.⁷⁸⁷ Unusually, both enjoyed straight fights, against the Conservatives in East ward and against Labour in South West ward, although no agreements were reached to achieve this. East ward was thought to be the better prospect and all active campaigning was focused on the ward. Gee won, and became Rugby's first Liberal councillor since 1934, and Turner came within 200 votes of victory.

Gee's first act as a Liberal councillor was another innovation. Having formed a ward LA, he commenced a canvass of the ward in which "each householder [was] invited to give details of his grievances about matters relevant to the Borough Council and asked not to

⁷⁸⁶ Rugby LA, Minutes, 8 Sep 52

⁷⁸⁷ Rugby LA, Papers, Statement of Accounts, 30 Sep 54. £18 was spent on Kilroy's 1950 contest and £21 was spent on the lone 1951 contest — Rugby LA, Papers, Statements of Accounts, years ending 30 Sep 50 and 30 Sep 51 and Minutes, 21 May 51

hesitate to contact Councillor Gee if he [felt] that his Councillor might be able to help him with some difficulty”, with a particular emphasis placed on housing issues.⁷⁸⁸ Gee argued in 1955 that it was “not only the responsibility but the duty of Borough Councillors to do all in their power to visit their Ward residents”.⁷⁸⁹ This initiative contributed to the election of another Liberal councillor for East ward, T. L. K. White, in 1955, this time in a three-cornered contest, although a stronger Conservative candidate held on to the ward in 1956. By this time, the financing of local elections had been left as far as possible to ward committees, the main LA spending just £15 on local elections in 1956.⁷⁹⁰ Politically, Gee and White prominently pursued two unfashionable issues — the sale of council houses to tenants and the opening up of council committee meetings to the press and public.⁷⁹¹

Gee, working with White, followed up his post-election canvass with a “printed ‘report-back’ letter” sent out to electors in order “to improve the contact between councillors and their electorates”.⁷⁹² This letter, which provided the model for report-back leaflets by other Liberal councillors in Rugby, dwelt entirely on local issues and mention was made of the Liberal Party only in small print at the end. The electioneering tactics pioneered by Gee and White enabled the Liberals to break out of East ward for the first time in 1958 when Peter Barrass won a by-election caused by an elevation to the aldermanic bench in North East ward. It was reported that “Mr Barrass and his colleagues on the North East Ward

⁷⁸⁸ Rugby LA, Papers, “The Rugby Liberal”, summer 1954. Repeated efforts were made to form a ward committee in East ward in 1951 and 1952, seemingly without success, Rugby LA, Minutes, 12 Mar 51, 21 May 51, 2 Jul 51, 21 Jan 52, 18 Feb 52, 17 Mar 52

⁷⁸⁹ Rugby LA, Papers, Liberal leaflet, East ward election, 1955

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., Receipts and Payments, year ending 30 Sep 56

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., Secretary’s Report, 1956

⁷⁹² Ibid., “The Rugby Liberal”, winter 1954–55

committee have been following the plan which has proved so successful in the East Ward, of calling back on Ward residents for complaints and achieving that personal contact between councillor and elector that we so earnestly wish to foster”.⁷⁹³ By 1964 there were seven Liberal councillors representing four different wards and their election literature, although still based on familiar local issues, had begun to make use of party political slogans and LPO artwork.

Liberal activity in local elections encouraged rather than discouraged efforts to contest parliamentary elections. One prominent YLA member said that local elections were chosen as a focus for the LA precisely in order to ensure that general elections were fought more regularly than before, an aim mentioned in the minutes of the LA’s 1952 annual general meeting.⁷⁹⁴ The YLA urged the LA’s Executive Committee to find a prospective parliamentary candidate as early as February 1951 and, two years later, officials of the West Midlands Liberal Federation were invited to discuss the possibility of the LA adopting a prospective candidate even though it was thought that the association could not afford to fight the next general election.⁷⁹⁵ The Young Liberals’ aim was, eventually, achieved when, having not contested the constituency since 1929, the LA decided after the 1955 general election that it would contest the next general election.⁷⁹⁶ A prospective candidate, Simon Goldblatt, was in place by 1957 and worked with Liberal councillors and activists both in local elections in Rugby and to prepare the ground more broadly for the

⁷⁹³ Ibid., Executive Committee Report, 1957–58

⁷⁹⁴ Rugby LA, Minutes, 17 Nov 52

⁷⁹⁵ Interview, Peter Turner and Rugby LA, Minutes, 12 Feb 51, 15 Jan 53

⁷⁹⁶ Rugby LA, Papers, “The Liberal Outlook Today”, Jun 56

general election campaign.⁷⁹⁷ Goldblatt saved his deposit in 1959, securing 15.7 per cent of the poll in an extremely marginal constituency, but did less well in 1964, after Liberal fortunes in local elections had peaked. Some activists had expected victory in 1959,⁷⁹⁸ but the results of the two general elections showed that although Liberals could gain support in a small number of urban wards as a result of vigorous campaigning on local issues, it was more difficult to attract votes from across the whole constituency when up against the full weight of the two major parties' electoral machines.

SOUTHEND

Southend developed as a commuter town for City of London businessmen during the second half of the nineteenth century and, as such, was thoroughly Conservative. Only after one election in the twentieth century, in 1906, was Southend not represented in Parliament by a Conservative, when the Liberal voters of Tilbury and Grays briefly outweighed the Tories of Southend in the former Essex South East constituency.⁷⁹⁹ Southend was never a Liberal stronghold at local government level, and the last Liberal councillors for the town died in the 1940s.⁸⁰⁰

The Liberal Party's fortunes in Southend were at a particularly low ebb in the ten years from 1945 to 1955. In the 1945 general election the Liberals were relegated from second to third place in the constituency, their share of the poll reduced from 21.1 per cent to 16.5

⁷⁹⁷ Interviews, Peter Turner, Simon Goldblatt

⁷⁹⁸ Interview, Peter Barrass

⁷⁹⁹ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p69

⁸⁰⁰ Southend LA, Minutes, 17 Mar 45, 1 Jun 48

per cent, as Labour ran Sir Henry Channon close. The LA was bereft of a chairman from July to November 1945 and attempts to appoint a paid agent, which began immediately after the general election, were not successful until August 1946.⁸⁰¹ Although the agent, J. Martin, did succeed in breathing new life into Southend LA,⁸⁰² lack of income remained a problem and parliamentary and local election candidates were expected to pay their own expenses.⁸⁰³

The division of Southend into two parliamentary constituencies was to prove of benefit to the Liberal organisation in the long run, as most of the Party's activists were to be found in the western division where Liberal efforts were subsequently concentrated. In the short term, however, the Liberals continued to struggle. The Liberal candidate in Southend West in 1950, J. McCallum Scott, considered that his chance of victory was dependent on Labour not nominating a candidate, an unlikely scenario given the result in Southend in 1945.⁸⁰⁴ He took 16.7 per cent of the poll, the Liberal share of the vote in Southend East was 10.7 per cent, and neither seat was contested by the Liberals in 1951.

The Liberal Party's resurgence in Southend after 1955 was primarily due to the recruitment of several key activists during the Party's leanest years, particularly Bert Savage, John and Jean Sargent, David Evans, and Ken McKinnon. They began contesting local elections in a more organised manner than hitherto: committees were formed to sharpen the Liberals'

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 26 Jul 45, 26 Sep 45, 20 Nov 45, 30 Apr 46, 17 Jun 46, 4 Jul 46, 19 Jul 46, 26 Aug 46

⁸⁰² Ibid., 27 Aug 47

⁸⁰³ Ibid., 30 May 45, 26 Jul 45, 7 Jan 47, 4 Feb 47, 25 Jun 47, 5 Nov 47, 31 Dec 47, 14 Jan 48, 11 May 48, 6 Jun 48, 7 Sep 48, 9 Nov 48

⁸⁰⁴ Southend West LA, Minutes, 1 Apr 49

ward organisation and campaigning techniques, and to develop a Liberal policy for the town.⁸⁰⁵ Southend West LA's expansion was facilitated by a ward quota scheme introduced by John Sargent in 1959, which led to most of the town's ward LAs contributing over £50 per annum to the constituency organisation.⁸⁰⁶ McKinnon formulated a ten-year plan for the development of the LA, which covered general and local election strategy, relationships with the press, and cooperation with Southend East LA.⁸⁰⁷ From the outside, Southend West LA seemed imbued with a missionary zeal which helped attract new recruits.⁸⁰⁸

The Liberals' first breakthrough in a local government election occurred when Evans was elected in Prittlewell ward in 1956, Labour having accidentally failed to nominate a candidate.⁸⁰⁹ This result was not followed up successfully in 1957, but when two vacancies arose in the ward in 1958 both were claimed by Liberals. In the next four years, the Liberals were able to win all but one of the wards in Southend West, and a few wards in the East of the town. The Liberals' zenith came in 1962 when the Party won all ten contested wards and the Conservatives lost control of the borough council.

Southend Liberals pioneered the use of report-back leaflets which became an essential element of the Liberals' advance in the town. The leaflets were first used by Evans who wanted his electors to know how and why he had voted, no doubt in part influenced by the

⁸⁰⁵ Interviews, Jean Sargent, Tim Ray and Southend West LA, Minutes, 8 Feb 57, 8 Mar 57

⁸⁰⁶ Interview, Tim Ray and Southend West LA, Minutes, 10 Apr 59, 10 Jun 60, 7 Oct 60, 9 Dec 60, 13 Jan 61, 14 Jul 61, 10 Nov 61, 11 Jan 63, 20 Sep 63

⁸⁰⁷ Southend West LA, Minutes, 13 Jun 58, 4 Jul 58

⁸⁰⁸ Interview, Michael King

⁸⁰⁹ Interviews, David Evans, Tim Ray, Jean Sargent; later claims that a Liberal-Labour pact operated in Southend were angrily refuted, Southend West LA, Minutes, 9 Jun 61

unusual circumstances of his election.⁸¹⁰ As in Rugby, although there was no communication between the Rugby and Southend Liberals on this matter, the leaflets were distributed throughout the year rather than just at election time and dealt exclusively with local matters with little reference to the Liberal Party or its national policies.⁸¹¹ An attempt by the Conservative Party to copy the Liberal leaflets failed because the Conservative leaflets were produced only during an election campaign and were politically partisan.⁸¹² After the initial Council Comments leaflets proved successful, other ward LAs produced their own leaflets, or bought copies of Council Comments for use in their own locality.⁸¹³

The rapid expansion in the number of Liberal councillors in Southend was mirrored by increases in the number of members of both of the town's LAs, and by improvements in the Party's position in parliamentary elections in the town. Southend LA has been described as having only around ten active members in 1946, but Southend West LA had 988 members in April 1959 and 2,435 in November 1962.⁸¹⁴ Southend East LA, always smaller and less well organised, expanded from 253 members in July 1960 to 570 in December 1961.⁸¹⁵ The Liberal share of the poll in Southend West increased from 15.0 per cent in 1955 to 24.2 per cent in the 1959 by-election (when Labour were again relegated to third place) and 22.3 per cent in the subsequent general election, and to 28.8 per cent in

⁸¹⁰ Interview, David Evans

⁸¹¹ Interviews, Tim Ray, Michael King, Jean Sargent and Southend West LA, Papers, local election literature

⁸¹² Interview, Jean Sargent

⁸¹³ For example see Southend West LA, Minutes, 20 May 60. Leigh Ward LA produced Progress Report and St Clements Ward LA produced New Liberal Times

⁸¹⁴ Interview, Jean Sargent and Southend West LA, Minutes, 10 Apr 59, 30 Nov 62

⁸¹⁵ Southend West LA, Minutes, 8 Jul 60, 8 Dec 61

1964. David Evans contested Southend East in 1964 and secured 14.8 per cent of the vote, a better result than that of the last Liberal candidate fourteen years before. The Liberal councillors were extensively featured in the election literature of Gurth Hoyer-Miller, Liberal candidate for Southend West in 1964, and one page of his election address was devoted to local issues: although there were fears that some ward activists would shun the general election campaign to concentrate on municipal issues, they were not borne out.⁸¹⁶

The representation of the Liberal Party on Southend Borough Council was static from 1962–4 and then sharply declined so that by 1967 only two Liberal councillors remained. Partly this was a consequence of the national political situation after Labour's general election victory in 1964, which posed difficulties for Liberals seeking to advance in Conservative areas, but the Liberals also suffered because their rapid expansion in 1962 had hidden underlying weaknesses. A number of the councillors elected in 1962 had not wished to serve on the borough council or soon proved themselves to be electoral liabilities and this undermined the Party's credibility.⁸¹⁷ The LAs in a number of the wards won were not sufficiently well organised to be able to follow up the successes of 1962, particularly as the Liberal Party's star began to wane. The autonomy of ward LAs, particularly in relation to their attitudes to key local questions such as the future of the town's grammar schools, new road schemes, and the development of Southend airport, led to disputes between councillors and were capable of being exploited by the Conservatives.⁸¹⁸ Even in 1967, however, the Liberal share of the vote in local elections

⁸¹⁶ Interview, Tim Ray

⁸¹⁷ Interviews, Tim Ray, Michael King, Jean Sargent; and see pp 148–9 on the selection of local government candidates in Southend

⁸¹⁸ Interviews, Tim Ray, Michael King, Jean Sargent

in Southend was higher than in 1960 and the foundations had been laid for future local government successes.

LIVERPOOL

Liverpool could scarcely be regarded as a city in which the Liberal Party was traditionally strong. As a result of an influx of Irish immigrants into the city from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Liverpool was divided on religious lines. At the turn of the century, Liberal support was largely restricted to the Irish community in the riverside slums, which in the Scotland division was sufficiently numerous to elect an Irish Nationalist, T. P. O'Connor, from 1885 to 1929. Even in 1906, the Liberal Party could win only two of Liverpool's nine seats. After the First World War, the Labour Party gained support from the Catholic community at the expense of the Liberals and, apart from surprising victories in the more middle-class West Derby and Wavertree constituencies in 1923, the Liberal Party in the city was eclipsed.

The Liberal Party's representation on Liverpool City Council was quickly ended after 1945. The Liberal group on the council was reduced from ten to six as a result of the 1945 municipal elections, in which the Liberals contested just nine of Liverpool's 40 wards. The only seat held that year was the tiny Castle Street ward where an arrangement existed with the Conservative Party. Elsewhere, the Liberal seat in St Peter's ward went undefended and the sitting councillors in Fairfield and Childwall were heavily defeated. Only three wards were fought in 1946, and the one Liberal victor, in a straight fight with Labour in St Peter's, joined the Conservative Party shortly afterwards. Thereafter the Liberal Party

contested only two or three wards — usually including Aigburth and Wavertree — and the last Liberal councillor disappeared in 1950 when the Castle Street ward was abandoned to the Conservatives. In both 1955 and 1957 no Liberal candidates contested the elections to Liverpool City Council and the last two Liberal aldermen, both kept in place by the Conservatives and held in contempt by some Liberal activists in the city, vanished in 1956.⁸¹⁹

The rump of the Liberal Party remaining after 1945 was almost entirely middle-class in character, with one or two traditionally Liberal families from the city's business community, such as the Bibbys and Holts, playing a prominent role. The Liberal headquarters in Wavertree provided a focus for Liberal social and electoral activity. By the mid-1950s, there was no sign of the former Liberal strength in the city centre wards or in the Edge Hill district. In 1957, there were Liberal associations in five Liverpool constituencies, but only three — Wavertree, Garston and West Derby — made reports to the annual meeting of the Liverpool Liberal Federation, and West Derby constituency LA was founded only in March 1956.⁸²⁰ In 1959 Toxteth was added to the list of active LAs in Liverpool, although the West Derby LA had been dissolved and re-formed since 1957, indicating that it remained weak.⁸²¹

Even in the early 1950s local elections were a means of recruiting Liberal activists in Liverpool. Alec Gerrard was recruited during the local election contest in Wavertree in 1952, and acted as agent in Church ward from 1953 onwards. He recruited Cyril Carr, a

⁸¹⁹ Interview, Alec Gerrard provided much of the information in this section

⁸²⁰ Liverpool Liberal Federation, Minutes, 25 Feb 57

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 6 Apr 60

solicitor and prominent member of the local Jewish community, who first contested Church ward in 1958. Carr's impact was immediate. The Liberals had come a distant second to the Conservative Party in the local elections of 1956 and 1957, with around 500 votes, but Carr polled over 1,000. Carr stood again in 1959 and 1960 and improved the Liberal position each time, but the ward remained solidly Conservative. Around this time Carr, Gerrard, and another key local activist, Tom Ellsworthy, met to discuss how to make the breakthrough from second place to victory in Church ward. They decided that, in order to win, the Liberal Party needed a new image, as a party dedicated to campaigning on local issues all year round. They instituted a broadsheet leaflet, Contact, replaced in 1965 by Focus, which solely addressed ward issues and asked for residents to respond with their own concerns and ideas for improvements.

Contact met with a dramatic response, described as "like taking a cork out of a bottle".⁸²² Church ward Liberals were inundated with casework with which Cyril Carr was now obliged to deal. The Liberals' new approach also attracted new activists, including Trevor Jones, who had previously been involved with a campaign group protesting against the construction of the M62 into Liverpool, and who, in the 1970s, was to become a central figure in Liberal Party politics. Carr's poll increased by 600 between 1959 and 1961, and by a further 1,200 to achieve victory in 1962. Similar campaigning techniques were adopted in the St Michael's ward, Toxteth, where the Liberals came from a distant second place in 1961 to win in 1962.

⁸²² Interview, Alec Gerrard

The success of the Liverpool Liberals in winning two wards for the first time since the Second World War did not herald a widespread surge of liberalism across the city. The victories had not resulted from the implementation of a city-wide Liberal strategy. The Liverpool Liberal Federation had not discussed local election strategy prior to May 1962, although a discussion of the good results achieved did take place after the elections of that year and a mechanism for the coordination of local election contests by the Federation was established for the first time.⁸²³ Despite this organisational innovation the Liberals failed to win any wards in 1963, only Gerrard in Church ward coming close, or in 1964. In 1965 St. Michael's ward was regained by the Conservatives, and Carr retained Church ward with a diminished majority. Partly this reflected the Liberals' determination to fight local elections on a broad front after the initial successes were recorded. In 1962 there were Liberal candidates in only nine of the city's 40 wards, and the north of Liverpool was virtually bereft of Liberals. Nineteen candidates were found in 1963 and eighteen in 1964, and ward associations were re-formed in previously derelict areas, including in the north of the city, specifically to fight local elections. There was criticism of this strategy in 1964, when the Executive Committee of the Federation decided "that we would not in future blithely fight wards where there was no organisation" and there was a significant discussion in July 1964 of the need to ensure that local elections were fought principally in those constituencies in which it was intended to nominate Liberal candidates for parliamentary elections.⁸²⁴

⁸²³ Liverpool Liberal Federation, Minutes, 30 May 62

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 May 64, 11 Jul 64

The use of ward-specific leaflets which strongly identified with the relevant Liberal candidate also hindered any attempt by the Liberals to make a city-wide appeal for votes. Carr discovered the limitations of the Liberals' strategy when contesting the Wavertree constituency in the 1964 general election. He expected the strategy he used to good effect in local elections to bear fruit in the general election. Although he increased the Liberal poll by 68.9 per cent, it was not enough to challenge successfully the Labour Party's hold on second place.

GREENOCK

Liberalism was a strong force in Greenock in the first half of the twentieth century, although in decline. The town was represented by a Liberal from 1906–31, latterly Sir Godfrey Collins who became a Liberal National and retained his seat until 1936. There was considerable Liberal support from the workers at Tate and Lyle's sugar refinery, as well as from other port workers, and as late as 1924 the Labour candidate finished behind Collins and the Conservative candidate.⁸²⁵ Subsequently, however, the Labour Party strengthened and provided the main challenge to Collins in 1929. The Conservatives withdrew from the parliamentary elections of the 1930s, supporting the Liberal Nationals. A similar alignment manifested itself in local politics, where the Labour Party battled with a Moderate group comprising Conservatives and Liberals, which, in 1947, was re-formed as the Greenock Progressive Association. In the 1950 general election the Liberal candidate polled 28.7 per cent against Labour, with no Conservative opponent. There was no Liberal candidate in 1951 or 1955, however.

⁸²⁵ Interview, James Boyd and Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p403

Bill Riddell was responsible for the resurgence of the Liberal Party in Greenock.⁸²⁶ He contested the 1959 general election, drawing on the resources of a handful of known Liberal sympathisers in his campaign. He polled over 10,000 votes, beating the Conservative candidate into third place. Following the election, Riddell concentrated on creating a Liberal organisation, including by forming a Young Liberal association. Particular emphasis was placed on recruiting well-known community leaders, including youth workers, trade unionists and a Church of Scotland minister.

The Greenock Liberals contested local elections for the first time in 1961. Four candidates were selected and each was elected. The defection of a sitting Labour councillor during the election campaign brought the Liberal strength on the burgh council to five. The Liberals highlighted what they regarded as mismanagement by the Labour-led council, particularly in relation to housing policy. Only those wards in which Liberal activists were prominent in the community were fought. New campaign tactics were introduced to Greenock by the Liberals, including grumble sheets and good morning leaflets.⁸²⁷ The intervention of the Liberals led to increased interest in Greenock's local elections and an immediate response from Labour, who subsequently portrayed the Liberals as supporters of high council house rents. Liberal candidates contested eight wards in 1962, five in 1963, and eight again in 1964. Steady progress was made, with two gains in 1962, one gain and one loss in 1963, and two gains in 1964. In 1967 the Liberal Party gained control of Greenock Burgh Council.

⁸²⁶ Interview, James Boyd provided information in this section

⁸²⁷ Grumble sheets were leaflets which included space for the recipients to write their comments or suggestions of issues which needed to be addressed and which could be returned to the local Liberals; good morning leaflets were delivered on the morning of the poll to Liberal supporters

Despite its increasing success in local elections, the Liberal Party fell back slightly in the general election of 1964 in Greenock, although it still held second place. This may have reflected the change of candidate, with a young local councillor, Campbell Barclay, contesting the seat rather than Riddell. Another factor in the Party's failure to advance was a recognition by activists that the seat could only be won after the Liberals had cemented themselves firmly into Greenock's local politics and that, at least for a time, local elections were a higher priority than parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, Greenock activists did assume prominent positions in the Scottish Liberal Party, with Riddell becoming Convenor of the SLP's Local Election Committee,⁸²⁸ and they were regularly involved in parliamentary by-election campaigns in Scotland. A recognition of the strength of the Liberal Party in Greenock was that the seat was the last mainland constituency not fought by the Conservatives, in the 1970 general election.

KEARSLEY

Kearsley is a small town between Manchester and Bolton, located in the Farnworth constituency during the 1945–64 period. Farnworth was a strongly Labour-supporting area after 1918 and, even before then, when the Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth constituency was generally represented by a Liberal, the Party was not well supported in the Kearsley area.⁸²⁹ The Liberal Party contested Farnworth only once between 1929 and 1974, when 75 year

⁸²⁸ Esslemont Papers, letter from W. Riddell to all Scottish LA secretaries, 28 Dec 61 (reference MS3057/2/8/1/3) and Aberdeen LA, Minutes, 27 Feb 63

⁸²⁹ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p259

old Abraham Lomax stood in 1950, one of his principal credentials being his early support for industrial de-rating, dating back as far as 1907.⁸³⁰

There was no Liberal association in the Farnworth constituency when John Rothwell first became involved in politics, leading a group opposed to the construction of a motorway through the town.⁸³¹ Rothwell approached several local MPs concerning the motorway scheme, receiving a reply only from Arthur Holt, Liberal MP for Bolton West. Holt worked with Rothwell to ameliorate the impact of the motorway scheme on Kearsley, thus persuading Rothwell, a Liberal supporter, to become involved in Liberal politics in Bolton. Encouraged to establish a Liberal organisation in Kearsley, he canvassed the town and established a small Liberal committee in September 1962.⁸³²

Within six months a vacancy arose on Kearsley UDC for South ward. Labour held all fifteen seats on the council and there had not been a contested election in the town for several years. A Liberal candidate contested the seat, taking advice from Holt's agent, and won convincingly. Liberal representation on the council rose to four later in 1963, to six in 1964 and to ten in 1965, when the Liberals took control of the council.

Unsurprisingly on such a small authority, the Liberals owed their success entirely to local issues, particularly concerning council house rents and repairs. The Liberal councillors relied primarily on canvassing and personal contact with voters in the town's small wards

⁸³⁰ House of Commons 1950 (The Times, 1950) p193

⁸³¹ Interview, John Rothwell provided the information in this section

⁸³² This body evidently paid an affiliation fee to the LPO in September 1962, on behalf of a divisional association which was not properly constituted for some years — North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 16 Nov 62

rather than report-back leaflets or grumble sheets. The success of the Liberals, especially after taking control of the council, tended to preclude efforts to fight parliamentary elections. For most of the 1960s, virtually all of Kearsley's active Liberals were councillors, funds were only just sufficient to pay for the activities of the branch LA without greater constituency-wide expense, and the Liberal organisations elsewhere in the Farnworth constituency did not enjoy the same degree of success as that in Kearsley. The Liberals of Kearsley, Little Lever, Worsley and Farnworth town did not combine to form an effective constituency organisation until shortly before the first 1974 election, after encouragement from Cyril Smith.

OTHER EXAMPLES

The cases outlined above are not the only examples of places where Liberal activists redirected their efforts to local government elections during the 1950s in response to the Liberal Party's desperate performance in parliamentary elections. In Orpington, for instance, a coterie of local activists quickly built up the LA's capacity to contest local elections on a coherent local platform with high quality candidates. From being practically moribund in the town in the early 1950s, the Liberal Party took control of the borough council shortly before winning the parliamentary seat in 1962.⁸³³ Liberals in Finchley used innovative campaigning techniques and exploited anti-Conservative sympathies amongst the borough's Jewish community to challenge Conservative hegemony at borough council and parliamentary level.⁸³⁴ Edinburgh Liberals made significant in-roads into the strength

⁸³³ D. Newby, The Orpington Story (Prism Publications, 1962) and Interview, Donald Newby

⁸³⁴ D. E. Butler and A. S. King, The British General of 1964 (Macmillan, 1965) pp249–51 and J. Irwin and D. Crawford, "The Finchley Story" (New Outlook, No. 22, Aug 63)

of the Progressive Association in the early 1960s by focusing on the need for far-reaching civic improvements.⁸³⁵ Community campaigning in West Ham and the mining village of Pelsall, Staffordshire, enabled Liberal candidates to take and hold wards long held by the Labour Party.⁸³⁶ In the Harborough constituency, on the initiative of Edward Rushworth, the Liberal Party fought local elections on a systematic basis from 1952 and after ten years there were 83 Liberal councillors, including on parish councils, in the constituency.⁸³⁷ Liberals in Hammersmith fought as “national politicians in local politics”, an approach which bore electoral fruit after 1964.⁸³⁸ Elsewhere, even where local elections did not become central to the Liberal Party’s electoral strategy before 1964, they were increasingly recognised as crucial by agents and ward organisers.⁸³⁹

CONCLUSION

A number of common themes can be drawn from the case studies presented above. First, the revival of the Liberal Party at local government elections was not strongly, if at all, related to areas of traditional Liberal strength. Liberals stood as independent candidates in local elections in the main areas of the “Celtic fringe” throughout the 1945–64 period and beyond. The Liberals did not make any concerted attempt to contest local elections in

⁸³⁵ Interviews, J. G. Gray, Robert Smith and J. G. Gray, Life With the Liberals 1956–66 (J. G. Gray, 1966)

⁸³⁶ Interviews, David Penwarden (West Ham) and Stan Evans (Pelsall); the West Ham Liberals’ initial breakthrough was in wards traditionally held by the Conservative Party, although then in Labour hands, see D. Peschek and J. Brand, Policies and Politics in Secondary Education: Case Studies in West Ham and Reading (Greater London Papers No. 11, London School of Economics, 1966)

⁸³⁷ Harborough LA, Minutes, 9 Mar 61, 15 Mar 62

⁸³⁸ Interview, Simon Knott

⁸³⁹ See Ashmore Papers, letters from J. Howe to B. Ashmore, 17 Oct 62, and from A. Powell to B. Ashmore, 3 Apr 63

Cornwall before 1964, and only a handful of Liberals stood as such in Devon before that time. In towns where the Liberal Party had retained a strong local government position, such as Rochdale, Huddersfield and Halifax, Liberal representation remained static or declined during the 1945–64 period. The case studies presented above include areas where the Liberal Party could claim some traditional strength — such as Greenock — and areas of relative weakness even in Edwardian times — such as Southend.

Secondly, in each case explicit decisions were taken to contest local government elections on a more organised and coherent basis than was previously the case, representing a clear break from past policy. This was most evident in Rugby, where a clear strategy was devised for local government elections across the town, but was also a factor in the development of Liberal politics in the Wavertree district of Liverpool, Greenock and Edinburgh. Elsewhere, Liberal candidates simply kept plugging away, without any strategic consideration of how a breakthrough could be achieved.

In several cases, the new strategies involved new election techniques employed before the first Liberal councillors were elected. This was the case in Greenock, where grumble sheets and good morning leaflets were introduced, and in Liverpool, where roadside election posters on stakes and distinctive Liberal car stickers were pioneered. Such innovations were not a precondition of Liberal electoral success, however. The Liberals in Kearsley achieved success with traditional campaigning methods, and the intentions of the Rugby Liberals to plan their local election campaigns in a systematic manner were not fully implemented at first, although Liberals in Rugby's East ward did make use of last-minute leaflets to rebut Conservative literature in the 1954 victory. The introduction of report-back

leaflets, which invited residents to report issues of local concern directly to their Liberal councillor and were usually delivered outside the normal electioneering period, in Rugby and Southend, were a response to election victories rather than a cause of them, at least in the early years. In both towns, innovative campaigning techniques were introduced by councillors elected in surprising circumstances who recognised the need to do something out of the ordinary to hold their seats in future years as much as to expand the Liberals' representation. In these towns, as was later found in Liverpool and elsewhere, such leaflets proved a particularly effective means of making contact with local residents and potential Liberal activists and of demonstrating a distinctively Liberal commitment both to local issues and to an ethos of consultation and responsiveness to local needs, particularly as the Liberals' opponents tended not to copy such tactics.

Another consistent trend was the rejection of election literature produced by the Liberal Party Organisation, and of literature dealing with national issues, in favour of locally produced literature covering exclusively local issues.⁸⁴⁰ The contrast between the old style of Liberal local election literature and the new-style literature which replaced it during the 1950s is best illustrated with reference to Liverpool. The city-wide "Liverpool Liberal" leaflet of May 1950 exhorted support for the three Liberal candidates in the municipal elections of that month underneath a message from Clement Davies, which dwelt on the lessons which could be learnt from the Liberal Party's disastrous performance in the general election earlier that year. The rest of the leaflet eschewed policies of any sort, local or national, in favour of lists of social events organised by Liverpool's Liberal associations and a political quiz. The leaflet's design was old-fashioned, the text cramped, and the

⁸⁴⁰ For example, Rugby LA, Papers, "Conclusions of 1954 Election Campaign"

typeface Victorian. Later issues, although not specifically geared towards local elections, featured attacks on the formation of Conservative and Liberal organisations following the Woolton-Teviot agreement, H. G. White on the Liberals' parliamentary election strategy, and a profile of James Burnie, MP for Bootle in the 1922 and 1923 Parliaments. In contrast, by 1964 wards were producing their own election literature which focused exclusively on local issues, such as school admissions and alterations to road traffic arrangements. The leaflets were smaller, better designed and appeared more modern. Contact details, including telephone numbers for councillors, candidates and key activists, were printed on the backs of the leaflets, with an open invitation given to electors to make contact with their local Liberals.

The existence of property owned, or associated with, Liberal associations after 1945 did provide a rationale for some LAs to remain in existence during long periods of electoral decline or inactivity and facilitated their later revival. Liberal activity in Southend and Liverpool was geared towards maintaining Liberal properties by means of whist drives and other regular money-raising events after 1945.⁸⁴¹ As a consequence, organised liberalism never disappeared from these areas and an organisational and physical electioneering infrastructure was maintained, even if in skeleton form, for the use of younger activists in the late 1950s and 1960s. Property was an important factor in the revival of Newbury LA,⁸⁴² but it was not a necessary condition of Liberal revival. Kearsley Liberals did without a permanent headquarters, and the Orpington Liberals bought their own Club after the famous by-election victory. It is not possible to conclude whether Liberal activity

⁸⁴¹ Interview, David Harcus

⁸⁴² See p68

persisted in areas in which property happened to remain in the control of Liberal organisations, or whether property was retained in Liberal hands in areas of Liberal persistence.

Another common factor, perhaps the most important all, was the emergence of key individuals who were able to drive the Liberal Party forward in several towns and cities. The organisational talent and charisma of activists such as Cyril Carr and Alec Gerrard in Liverpool, Bill Riddell in Greenock, John G. Gray and Robert Smith in Edinburgh, Derek Gee and Peter Turner in Rugby, John Sargent in Southend, John Pardoe in Finchley, and John Rothwell in Kearsley played an important role in the resurgence of Liberal strength in local elections. These activists brought a clear strategic vision to often moribund Liberal associations. They recruited new, young, energetic activists to help achieve success. They were often innovative, developing new ideas and, in meeting with other Liberal activists at Assemblies and by-elections, propagating ideas developed elsewhere. Most importantly, they were hard-working, sometimes pursuing victory in local elections for several years before being elected and then working equally hard to make an impact in council chambers. Through their efforts, they helped restore the credibility of the Liberal Party as an electoral force in those areas where they were active.

The experience of the Liverpool Liberals in the 1963–65 period exemplifies the dangers of over-reliance on key individuals. It was not uncommon for an initial Liberal breakthrough in a ward to be followed by failure to elect another Liberal councillor for the same ward for many years, because the Liberal Party had become so closely identified with the individual elected — such was the experience of Lady Morton in Newington ward,

Edinburgh, for instance. Similarly, it was often difficult for Liberals to translate success in one ward into victories in adjoining wards, or socially similar wards in the same town or city. The Kearsley and Greenock stories, where, in both cases, the Liberal Party was able to take control of the council shortly after the initial breakthrough, are exceptional, with Liberal success perhaps in both instances being due to the weakness of the opposition to the ruling Labour Party before the Liberals re-emerged. Another factor in many Liberal success stories was the small size of many wards, particularly in small UDCs such as Kearsley. This facilitated personalised election campaigns, focusing on local issues and reliant on only a handful of activists. Large wards in bigger towns and cities posed enormous challenges for limited Liberal organisations. There were around 25,000 electors in Liverpool's Church and St. Michael's wards in 1962, more than the entire population of Kearsley, indicating one reason why the Liberals were more successful in Kearsley than Liverpool in the 1960s.

Finally, the cases outlined above demonstrate that Liberal activists did not, for the most part, focus on local elections at the expense of parliamentary elections.⁸⁴³ On the contrary, local elections were deliberately used as a means of building up the organisational capacity and local credibility of the Liberal Party in order to fight parliamentary elections more effectively. The fruits of this policy were most evident in Orpington, where the Liberal victory in a parliamentary contest followed shortly after the Party took control of the town council. The Rugby Young Liberals devised their local election strategy with this aim, activists such as Cyril Carr and David Evans were long-standing and determined

⁸⁴³ There were occasional claims that some Liberal organisations were placing undue emphasis on contesting local elections, for example criticism of the West Midlands Liberal Federation in LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 19 Jul 63

parliamentary candidates as well as local politicians of note, and in Greenock the Liberals contested the parliamentary seat before beginning to fight local elections. The Kearsley Liberals were uniquely concerned with local elections for over ten years before contesting a parliamentary election, but Kearsley was only a small part of the Farnworth constituency and the Liberal Party was weak elsewhere in the district. Local elections were fought in Liverpool without the city-wide coordination required to link such contests to future parliamentary campaigns, but this was symptomatic of the inadequacy of the Liverpool Liberal Federation to cope with the explosion of activity at ward level from 1961–63, and was tackled after the 1964 local elections.

The LPO and Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Local government elections did not play a prominent role in the strategic thinking of the Liberal Party Organisation, at least until the early 1960s. Some thought was given to the Liberal position in local government immediately after the Second World War. A committee was formed in November 1945 “to assist in the formulation of leading principles for the guidance of Liberal candidates in local elections” but none of its original membership were elected councillors and it does not appear to have been particularly active.⁸⁴⁴ Hampstead Liberals recorded the opinion of headquarters in 1947 that if the Liberal Party was to contest 600 seats at the next general election it “must show it means business” in local elections and Frank Byers told the Yorkshire Liberal Federation in 1950

⁸⁴⁴ Eighth Report to the Assembly, LPO, May 46, p16 and appendix IV

that “we ought to fight local elections on party lines” but these statements were not backed up with action.⁸⁴⁵

The minutes of the Executive Committee of the LPO, which met monthly and received reports from federations’ staff and from the LPO’s Secretary or General Director, rarely discussed local elections between 1954–59 and 1961–64, the periods for which they survive. There was much discussion of the needs to improve organisation in the constituencies and to focus attention on those constituencies in which there appeared to be prospects of increasing the Liberal vote, but there was only a limited appreciation of how Liberal successes in local elections could be encouraged in pursuance of such objectives. Typical of headquarters’ attitude was the advice given to Enfield West Ward LA in 1952 that local elections should be fought only if Liberals were likely to win them.⁸⁴⁶ It was reported that the LPO had established a Local Government Department in 1953, but it cannot have operated for long as no mention was made of it in the Executive Committee minutes from 1954.⁸⁴⁷ The importance of local government elections to the Liberal Party was increasingly realised, however, particularly as evidenced by the creation of the LPO’s Local Government Department in 1960.

LPO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The LPO Executive Committee was not well informed about the position of the Liberal Party in local government. The Committee did not receive a report on the results of the

⁸⁴⁵ Hampstead LA, Minutes, 29 May 47 and Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 4 Jul 50

⁸⁴⁶ Enfield West Ward LA, Minutes, 10 Mar 52

⁸⁴⁷ Tregidga, “Liberal Party in South West England”, p262

local elections in 1954 or 1955. The LPO's General Director, H. F. P. Harris, did present a report in May 1956 in which he spoke of "causes for satisfaction" in certain areas of the country,⁸⁴⁸ although Table 29 shows a significant decrease in the number of Liberal borough councillors in England and Wales in that year. Later reports underlined the distant relationship between party headquarters and many LAs. Harris reported in May 1957 that the Liberal Party had made a net gain of 31 seats in the local elections, the best results for many years. Unfortunately, the BBC had broadcast a far more disappointing assessment, leading Harris to complain about the difficulties faced in gathering results from LAs.⁸⁴⁹ A concerted effort was made by Harris to contact LAs and federations in advance of the 1958 local elections so that they could send headquarters lists of candidates and results, but only seven per cent of those organisations contacted replied and Harris admitted that he had little idea of how Liberals had done in that year's county council elections.⁸⁵⁰ The results of the borough council elections in 1959 were "noted" but no specific comments about them were recorded in the minutes of the LPO Executive Committee.⁸⁵¹

Reports from the federations to the LPO Executive Committee did sometimes remark upon the number of Liberal councillors in particular areas, although not always accurately.⁸⁵² The prediction by the representative of the West Midlands Liberal Federation in November 1955 that there would be 38 Liberal candidates for election to Birmingham City Council

⁸⁴⁸ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 12 May 56

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 17 May 57

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 Apr 58

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8 May 59

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 9 Mar 57 for a report from the East Midlands Liberal Federation

in 1956 was optimistic; only eleven candidates stood, of which none were victorious.⁸⁵³ The Executive Committee was sometimes misinformed about the number of Liberal councillors in different regions. The report of the North West Federation in January 1956 that there were 134 Liberal borough councillors and 50 Liberal urban district councillors in the region was not too wide of the mark,⁸⁵⁴ but the Yorkshire Federation badly underated the number of Liberal councillors in the region when it reported in February 1956 that there were just 55 councillors of all sorts in the three Ridings.⁸⁵⁵

Little was done by the Executive Committee to give assistance of any sort to local candidates or LAs fighting local elections before 1960 and the LPO did not help finance local election contests at any time before 1964.⁸⁵⁶ There was some criticism by Executive Committee members that the April and May Committee meetings and the May Liberal Party Council in 1958 would clash with county and municipal council elections and it was agreed in May 1958 that such clashes would not be allowed again, but an Executive Committee meeting was held on 8 May 1959, suggesting that the matter had been forgotten.⁸⁵⁷ Other minuted remarks — for instance, the praise for two Liberal local election candidates in the Holland with Boston constituency in 1956, and the messages of congratulations to West Ham Liberals in 1957 and to the winner of a local by-election in

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 12 Nov 55; Newton, Second City Politics, p24

⁸⁵⁴ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 14 Jan 56. Earlier, the Federation's Executive Committee had debated the accuracy of the local election statistics prepared by its secretary — Minutes, 20 May 49

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., 11 Feb 56

⁸⁵⁶ LPO Standing Committee, Minutes, 22 Feb 60

⁸⁵⁷ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 9 May 58, 8 May 59

Wrexham in 1958 — suggested that Liberal involvement in local election contests was regarded as laudable, perhaps remarkable, but not essential.⁸⁵⁸

SCOTTISH LIBERAL PARTY

The leadership of the Scottish Liberal Party showed a lack of interest in local politics throughout the 1945–64 period, despite the development of the Liberal Party's position in local government in Edinburgh, Greenock and a few other towns. During the late 1940s and early 1950s the SLP leadership was divided over the question of whether the Liberal Party should ever contest local elections, with some SLP Executive Committee members openly supporting the local anti-socialist parties which were active in most Scottish burghs. The Greenock Liberals were instrumental in encouraging the SLP leadership to take more interest in local elections, but many Scottish Liberals, especially those fighting parliamentary elections in the Highlands and the Borders, did not agree that there was a place for party politics in local government and many Edinburgh Liberals did not seek to build upon the Party's local successes in parliamentary elections.⁸⁵⁹

AREA FEDERATIONS

The promotion of activity at local government level by the Liberal Party's area federations was not usually a key priority. Federation officials were mostly concerned with reviving inactive LAs and placing and supporting parliamentary candidates. The cautious attitude

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 9 Mar 56, 14 Dec 57, 13 Dec 58

⁸⁵⁹ Interview, John G. Gray

expressed by the Home Counties Liberal Federation to the LPO Executive Committee in March 1957, that local elections were “a means to an end and not an end in [themselves]”, was perhaps typical.⁸⁶⁰ The London Liberal Party did not regard local elections as a priority. In 1949, the Federation made grants totalling £334 to 27 wards in London for local elections, but this experiment was not repeated and requests for funding were firmly refused in later years.⁸⁶¹ The lack of interest shown by the Western Counties Federation in local elections has been described by Tregidga.⁸⁶² The Yorkshire Federation, however, took a consistent interest in local elections, offering encouragement to Liberals fighting for council seats, advocating that Liberals should stand under their party label rather than as independents, and, after 1960, organising local government conferences.⁸⁶³ The North West Federation adopted a similar approach, and its Secretary, Neville Stanton, increasingly recognised the existence of a link between the Liberal Party’s performance in local and parliamentary elections by describing the Cheadle parliamentary seat in 1961 as “marginal, or to become marginal” on account of recent local election results.⁸⁶⁴ Too often, however, area federations lacked the resources to focus on both parliamentary and local elections and the former were always the main priority.

⁸⁶⁰ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 9 Mar 57

⁸⁶¹ London Liberal Party, Minutes, 21 Oct 48, 15 Feb 49, 17 Mar 49, 27 Apr 49, 19 May 49, 1 May 50 and Finance and General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 15 Nov 49, 20 Mar 51, 22 Mar 60

⁸⁶² Tregidga, “Liberal Party in South West England”, p294

⁸⁶³ Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 1 May 48, 29 Apr 50, 22 Mar 52, 25 May 57, 5 Dec 59, 20 Feb 60, 3 Jun 61, 30 Nov 63

⁸⁶⁴ North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 16 Nov 45, 14 Dec 45, 21 Apr 50, 16 May 58, 19 Jun 59, 20 May 60, 21 Apr 61, 19 Jun 62, Altrincham and Sale LA, Minutes, 16 May 56 and Chester Observer, 14 Mar 59; some thought that the North West Federation was not sufficiently interested in local elections — Interview, Michael Meadowcroft

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

The local election successes detailed in the case studies presented above did not arise from advice or assistance provided by either the Liberal Party's headquarters or its area federations,⁸⁶⁵ bodies which rarely discussed or formulated policy on local elections. Attitudes changed at headquarters as the achievements of Liberal activists in winning local elections were increasingly discovered. H. F. P. Harris, whose regular tours of the constituencies were likely to have made him aware of some remarkable Liberal success stories in local government, made local elections an increasingly prominent component of his reports to the LPO's Executive Committee. In April 1958 he commented that "we wish we were in a better position to organise local elections",⁸⁶⁶ but, as noted above, inadequate information remained a problem. Greenock Liberals remembered the surprise expressed by the leaders of the Scottish Liberal Party that the Party was at all active in the town, never mind that it had fought and won local elections.⁸⁶⁷

A key figure in the recognition by the Liberal Party Organisation and, later, by the parliamentary party, of the importance of Liberal participation and success in local government elections was Richard Wainwright. As head of the LPO's Organisation Department he coordinated work to build up Liberal strength in the constituencies during the 1955 Parliament by means of a programme of visits by LPO Executive Committee members to 112 selected Liberal associations.⁸⁶⁸ The intention of the programme was to

⁸⁶⁵ For instance, Interview, Alec Gerrard

⁸⁶⁶ LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 11 Jan 58, 12 Apr 58

⁸⁶⁷ Interview, James Boyd

⁸⁶⁸ See LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 14 Jan 56, 11 Feb 56, 14 Apr 56

“build up the election front” by encouraging the strongest LAs to adopt centrally-approved candidates and to improve their organisations well in advance of the next election. The programme was innovative only in that it attempted to get the Party’s senior non-parliamentary figures campaigning in the constituencies. Its focus was traditional in terms of persuading LAs of the need to adopt a candidate and begin organising early for the next general election.

Wainwright’s first reports on the implementation of the programme dwelt on finance, the need for more candidates to be found, and successes in reviving LAs, all familiar topics for the LPO executive to consider.⁸⁶⁹ His report of 17 May 1957, however, signalled a distinct change of emphasis. Wainwright called for more candidates to come forward, particularly to contest constituencies where Liberals had made advances in local elections. This was the first recognition by a senior Liberal that local election results could indicate both areas of Liberal strength which could be exploited in a parliamentary context and signs of activity by Liberal members which could be channelled into the next general election campaign.⁸⁷⁰ Although recent improvements in Liberal local election results must have influenced Wainwright, it is likely that his own visits to LAs which were contesting local elections successfully, the reports he received from the Party’s travelling organiser, Edward Wheeler, and the success of Liberals contesting local elections in his own Colne Valley constituency, persuaded him to pay more attention to local elections.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., 14 Jul 56, 14 Dec 56, 8 Feb 57

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., 17 May 57

This change of emphasis did not last long. J. McLaughlin replaced Wainwright as head of the Organisation Department in June 1957 and no more mention was made of the relevance of local government elections to the prospects of Liberal success in the forthcoming general election. Nor did local elections figure in Frank Byers' plans when he became chairman of the pre-election campaign committee, which succeeded the Wainwright programme.⁸⁷¹ Wainwright remained convinced of the importance of local elections to Liberal strategy, however, and in 1960 he funded the creation of the Liberal Party Organisation's Local Government Department (LGD). In writing the foreword to the Department's first publication, the Local Government Handbook of December 1960, Wainwright gave an explanation of why local elections mattered in terms which could have been used by the proponents of community politics ten years later:

The paramount aim of every genuine Liberal association is to promote the return of a Liberal to Parliament. But voters are not impressed if local service is ignored and if they are only approached at parliamentary elections. A successful Association must be rooted in local service, without compromising liberalism for the sake of mere office or false prestige.⁸⁷²

The first head of the LGD was Pratap Chitnis, formerly assistant librarian at the National Liberal Club.⁸⁷³ Wainwright gave Chitnis the freedom to define his role and he identified three priorities. The first was to locate Liberal councillors using newspaper reports of local election results, a process which took several years. Liberals were encouraged to telephone headquarters with local election results, including by-election results, so that a

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 15 Jun 57, 10 Jan 59

⁸⁷² Local Government Handbook, p7

⁸⁷³ Interviews, Pratap Chitnis and Michael Meadowcroft inform the following section

comprehensive database could be maintained, but not all LAs complied and the area federations refused financial assistance to facilitate this process in 1962.⁸⁷⁴

Secondly, Chitnis arranged a programme of visits to Liberal council groups, which his successor, Michael Meadowcroft,⁸⁷⁵ was to inherit. At first, the aim of these visits was simply to make Liberal councillors aware that the LPO had created a department specifically concerned with their activities. It was initially intended to visit each Liberal council group biannually. Some Liberal council groups, particularly those in Lancashire and Yorkshire which had remained strong throughout the post-war period, were not particularly interested in hearing from or about the LPO in London. Others, such as the Liberal group in Bacup, which was centred on the town's Baptist church, had never been contacted by the LPO before and the visits were used to draw the councillors more closely into the Party.

As well as building up the LGD's list of contacts with Liberal councillors, and indicating to Liberals around the country that local government elections were a priority of the LPO, the visits by Chitnis and Meadowcroft were an opportunity to discover examples of good practice in local electioneering and to propagate such practices around the country. The Local Government Handbook was the most comprehensive attempt by the Liberal Party to advise activists on how best to fight local elections. They were advised to fight on local issues and to avoid pacts with other parties at all times. Campaigning was described as a

⁸⁷⁴ Local Government Handbook, p94, LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 28 Apr 62 and Stockport Liberal Papers, memorandum from P. Chitnis to LA secretaries, Mar 61, complaining that "associations are still not notifying their federation secretaries of their plans for this year's local elections" (reference B/NN/2/100)

⁸⁷⁵ Meadowcroft was appointed assistant Local Government Officer in late 1961 and replaced Chitnis one year later — LPO Executive Committee, Minutes, 11 Nov 61, 15 Dec 62

“continuous process” and there were stipulations about the need for rigorous candidate selection processes. The most important message communicated to LAs by the handbook was that “those areas where, in recent years, Liberals have made the greatest progress in achieving representation on councils have not necessarily been those places where our policy was any better than that of Liberals elsewhere, but places where our organisation, whether amateur or professional, could match and even surpass that of our professionally organised opponents”.⁸⁷⁶

The advice that pacts were to be shunned was controversial. It was backed by senior figures in the Liberal Party, including Wainwright and Frank Byers, and followed from the decision to break the local Liberal/Conservative pact in Bolton and contest the Bolton East parliamentary by-election in November 1960. The dangers of pacts were not spelt out in the Local Government Handbook,⁸⁷⁷ but, in the improving electoral conditions of the early 1960s, the Liberal leadership wanted to break away from the cosy Liberal/Conservative arrangements which existed in several parts of the country and which stunted the development of the Liberal Party in both local and parliamentary elections in return for the protection of a small number of existing Liberal seats on councils and in the House of Commons. When this new policy was explained to Liberal councillors in Rochdale, who had long operated in tandem with the Conservatives at local level, Michael Meadowcroft was heard in silence and then dismissed. Long-standing Liberal councillors in towns such as Rochdale considered that they had too much to lose from more vigorous party

⁸⁷⁶ Local Government Handbook, p80

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p85

competition.⁸⁷⁸ Elsewhere, the firm stand taken by headquarters against pacts and electoral arrangements was welcomed.⁸⁷⁹

The Local Government Handbook did not recommend that LAs use grumble sheets, report-back leaflets or similar innovations to fight local elections. Such developments were brought to the attention of the LGD during the visits undertaken by Chitnis and Meadowcroft. Liberal News and the Local Government Newsletter, produced by the LGD, played an important role in encouraging the use of such techniques in the early 1960s.⁸⁸⁰ Meadowcroft's visits were also a means of bringing new campaigning ideas to the attention of local councillors. By the mid-1960s there existed a "travelling circus" of LGD advisers, including David Evans of Southend, Frank Davis of Finchley, and David Marchant, a Lewisham activist in the public relations business who designed colourful, modern Liberal literature. By no means all LAs were receptive to these new ideas. In rural Wales, for instance, the local Liberals would not countenance contesting local elections on a party basis and all-year-round campaigning was dismissed as impractical given the twin constraints of the winter weather and the summer tourist boom.⁸⁸¹ Nevertheless, Merionethshire LA would phone through its local election results to the LGD every year, reporting that all of the councillors elected were Liberal, although they fought without party labels.

⁸⁷⁸ See also LPO Papers, Report on Rochdale LA, E. Wheeler, Dec 64 (reference 17/3/80-2)

⁸⁷⁹ Interviews, D. F. Burden, Joan Davies, Nancy Seear

⁸⁸⁰ For example, the suggestions and complaints form of Cllr. P. Morgan, Sittingbourne West ward, 14 Dec 64, Sittingbourne LA, Papers (reference U2922/A9)

⁸⁸¹ See also LPO Papers, questionnaires from Montgomeryshire LA, 7 Jan 65, and Torrington LA, 3 Feb 65 (references 17/3/9, 77)

A further means of propagating good practice in the fighting of local elections was the organisation of conferences of councillors and local election candidates. These were not necessarily innovations,⁸⁸² but the Local Government Department was able to organise both national and area conferences more frequently than had taken place before.⁸⁸³ Their success led to consideration of the establishment of an association of Liberal councillors in 1964.⁸⁸⁴

The Special Aid scheme for target seats was not used to encourage LAs to contest local elections more effectively. This reflected the view that, although some LAs could adopt the “Orpington Model” and use local elections as part of a parliamentary election campaign, Liberals could win parliamentary contests in other areas irrespective of local elections.⁸⁸⁵ These included constituencies in which the Liberals did not contest any local elections as well as those such as Chippenham where the Liberal councillors “contributed little” to the LA and fighting local elections had done the LA little good; Darwen, where the Liberal councillors were described as “neither helpful nor politically astute”; and Eastbourne, where the Liberal councillors were “remote from the grass roots”.⁸⁸⁶ There was

⁸⁸² For example the West Midlands Liberal Federation conference of Liberal councillors, aldermen and candidates, Mirfin Papers, press cutting, 21 Feb 58. The Federation had proposed to organise a national conference, as a prelude to the creation of an association of Liberal councillors, but this had been rejected by some federations — North West Liberal Federation, Minutes, 20 Jun 58 and LPO Council, Minutes, 12 Jul 58

⁸⁸³ See Annual Report and Accounts, LPO, 1961, pp3–4 and 1962, p11

⁸⁸⁴ LPO General Election Campaign, Minutes, 27 Jul 64

⁸⁸⁵ See LPO Papers, Report on Cheadle LA by E. Wheeler, 25 Feb 65 (reference 17/3/52) for reference to the Orpington Model

⁸⁸⁶ LPO Papers, Reports on Chippenham LA, 7 Dec 62, Darwen, 24 Feb 65, Eastbourne, 26 Mar 65, by E. Wheeler (references 17/3/204–7, 252–5, 263–5)

also criticism of Huddersfield Liberal Association for its undue focus on local elections, at the expense of parliamentary elections.⁸⁸⁷

Liberal MPs and Local Government

Dr John Meadowcroft, of Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, has cited the leadership of Jo Grimond, and a campaigning strategy devised by Mark Bonham Carter, as important factors in the new emphasis placed on local government by the Liberal Party in the early 1960s.⁸⁸⁸ Both men made encouraging noises about the Party's role in local politics, in particular Jo Grimond's comment that "every time a Liberal councillor gets a bus stop moved to a better place he strikes a blow for the Liberal Party".⁸⁸⁹ Neither, however, made a significant direct contribution to the decisions by Liberal activists to reorient their electoral strategies towards fighting local elections. Party politics did not feature in local government in Grimond's constituency and he was criticised by some activists for lacking interest in the subject.⁸⁹⁰ When Grimond wrote an internal memorandum on the Party's strategy in 1961, it made no mention of local government elections. Frank Ware responded by arguing that "local government must be a vital part of our advance" and described the Party's Local Government Department as "the Cinderella of our headquarters' departments", but Grimond's response again overlooked local

⁸⁸⁷ LPO Papers, Report on Huddersfield West LA by E. Wheeler, 13–14 May 64 (reference 17/3/303–4)

⁸⁸⁸ J. Meadowcroft, "The Origins of Community Politics" (Journal of Liberal Democrat History, No. 28, Autumn 2000) pp3–9

⁸⁸⁹ Guardian, 3 Oct 60. Bonham Carter was quoted as saying that "it is easier to change people's voting habits at local elections than at by-elections, and at by-elections than at general elections" — K. Young in C. Cook and J. A. Ramsden, By-elections in British Politics (Macmillan, 1973) pp199–200

⁸⁹⁰ See, for example, Interview, Simon Knott

government.⁸⁹¹ Grimond's main preoccupations were with overhauling the Liberal Party's policies and in chasing the elusive "realignment of the left", particularly during the 1964 Parliament, themes emphasised in his memoirs, which make no mention of local government politics.⁸⁹² Only as late as October 1963 was it first suggested that Grimond should play a role in the Party's local election campaign, by speaking in five winnable boroughs.⁸⁹³

Bonham Carter similarly did not owe his election in 1958 to the Liberal Party's position in local politics in Devon and was actively opposed to Liberals standing as such in Devon, although Paul Tyler broke with tradition to stand for election to Devon County Council as a Liberal in 1964.⁸⁹⁴ There was no national Liberal campaigning strategy based upon fighting local elections in the early 1960s. Grimond and other senior Liberals instead sought to find out why the Party had won the Orpington by-election in 1962 and performed well in other parliamentary contests at around the same time, so that the Party's general election campaign could be tailored accordingly. The idea that the Orpington result could have been at least partly due to the Liberal Party's success at local government level in the area, going back to 1955, was barely discussed and instead the Party tried to find a policy mix which would appeal to a mythical group of "new" middle-class or "Orpington man" voters.

⁸⁹¹ Behrens Papers, memoranda by J. Grimond "Does the Liberal Party Really Mean Business?", 13 Apr 61, Frank Ware, 17 Apr 61, and J. Grimond, 27 Apr 61

⁸⁹² J. Grimond, Memoirs, (Heinemann, 1979)

⁸⁹³ LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 14 Oct 63

⁸⁹⁴ There were already at this time Liberal parish councillors in Winkleigh, in the Torrington division

Grimond's successor, Jeremy Thorpe, was only a little more interested in local politics: Burton has argued that "pavement politics ... were certainly not Thorpe's fort  ".⁸⁹⁵ When Thorpe was first elected, in 1959, the Liberal Party did not contest seats in local government elections in his constituency, Devon North. Liberals did begin fighting seats in some of the towns in the constituency, most notably Bideford, after 1959 but this was on the initiative of Thorpe's agent, Lilian Prowse.⁸⁹⁶ Thorpe's Special Aid scheme mostly channelled funds into seats in Scotland, Wales and south west England where the Liberal Party did not contest local elections. Thorpe and his team did not encourage LA activists to fight local elections: indeed, Wheeler's reports on the vitality of LAs included criticisms of undue emphasis being placed on local elections.⁸⁹⁷ Promising local election results may have contributed to the decisions to bring Finchley and Cheadle into the Special Aid Scheme, but the main criterion for inclusion was the existing or potential strength of the Liberal vote in parliamentary elections. Thorpe's view of the development of community politics, expressed in his volume of recollections, was that it began at around the time he became leader of the Liberal Party, in 1967, and flowered after the 1973 local elections.⁸⁹⁸

Three Liberal MPs during the 1945–64 period — Donald Wade, Arthur Holt, and Eric Lubbock — represented constituencies in which the Liberal Party had a sizeable presence at local government level but none became champions of the Party's involvement in local politics. Wade was not closely connected to the Liberal councillors in Huddersfield. Holt played a part in the revival of the Liberal Party's fortunes on Bolton Borough Council and

⁸⁹⁵ Burton, "Making of Liberal Party Policy", pp168–9

⁸⁹⁶ Interview, Lilian Prowse

⁸⁹⁷ LPO Papers, Report on Huddersfield West, E. Wheeler, 13–14 May 64 (reference 17/3/303–4)

⁸⁹⁸ J. Thorpe, In My Own Time (Politico's, 1999) pp99, 133

was persuaded of the importance of expanding the Party's strength in local government more generally, but did not play a part in achieving this at the national level.⁸⁹⁹ Lubbock was the only Liberal MP elected between 1945–64 in a constituency in which the Liberal Party controlled a municipal authority. As has been noted, however, contemporary analysts, both inside and beyond the Liberal Party, tended not to consider this factor as helping to explain Lubbock's victory. Lubbock himself was not one of the architects of the Liberal Party's strong position on Orpington UDC, being a recently elected councillor for an outlying village ward who had relied for his election largely on a personal vote. He did write in praise of Wallace Lawler and Cyril Carr, in 1963, however.⁹⁰⁰

The Orpington by-election could have changed attitudes at the top of the Party by showing how success in local government elections could create the conditions for parliamentary elections to be won. Polling organised by Timothy Joyce for the LPO Executive Committee after the Orpington by-election found that the Liberals' local campaigning and strong position in local government in the constituency was one of four key factors which influenced the Liberal vote.⁹⁰¹ This finding was overlooked by the Liberal leadership, however, which chose to focus on the survey's other findings, particularly the perception that the Liberal Party was more modern in outlook than the Conservative Party. Complaints about the inattention of leading Liberals to local elections continued to be heard at least until the late 1960s.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁹ Interview, Arthur Holt; Holt was Liberal Chief Whip 1962–3 and then suffered a nervous breakdown which help explain why he was not closely involved with the establishment and work of the Local Government Department

⁹⁰⁰ Local Government Newsletter (LPO, No. 17, Nov 63)

⁹⁰¹ LPO Papers, "Orpington By-election Survey: Progress Report", T. Joyce, 11 Apr 62 (reference 5/2, p52)

⁹⁰² Interview, Simon Knott

Liberal Council Groups

In 1967, J. G. Bulpitt examined the nature of party organisation and discipline on councils, and the style of local politics, in a range of boroughs in north west England, focusing on the period from 1955 to 1960.⁹⁰³ He focused primarily on the Conservative and Labour Parties, but his conclusions with respect to the Liberal Party merit comparison against the 31 interviews undertaken with Liberal councillors during the period from 1945 to 1964 for this thesis.

Bulpitt studied in detail the Liberal group on Rochdale borough council; and also considered the role of Liberals on Middleton, Salford and Manchester councils. He found that Liberal council groups tended to be loosely, if at all, organised. There were only two meetings of the Rochdale Liberal group between 1945 and 1960, for instance, and he recorded that the Middleton Liberals never met formally as a group “but acted throughout as individuals”.⁹⁰⁴ The Manchester Liberals were “elderly and played little part in council affairs”.⁹⁰⁵ The Liberal council groups he studied had no formal mechanisms for whipping or disciplining members, something of which Liberals tended to be proud. The meetings of the Rochdale group, for instance, were both for the purposes of discussion rather than to issue voting instructions.⁹⁰⁶ Bulpitt did find evidence of informal political discussions between Liberal councillors in Rochdale and noted that many younger Liberal councillors

⁹⁰³ Bulpitt, Party Politics in English Local Government

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp24, 79

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., p59

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., p79

did tend to vote together.⁹⁰⁷ This he attributed to the influence of the leader of the Rochdale group, particularly his role in the selection of Liberal council candidates.⁹⁰⁸

In general, Bulpitt found that Liberal and Conservative council groups were similarly organised and that both were usually different from Labour groups. Although Labour groups were more varied than Liberal and Conservative groups,⁹⁰⁹ Bulpitt noted that they tended to be organised more formally, with disciplinary and other rules usually enshrined in standing orders.⁹¹⁰ Bulpitt's study of councillors in north west England lends credence to a characterisation of Liberal councillors during the 1945–64 period as disorganised, undisciplined independents, united only by a party label of uncertain significance and a reliance on Conservative support for their success at the polls. Interviews with councillors, and local party workers, active before 1964 have shown that this characterisation is a caricature which overlooks the increasing emphasis placed on the need for organisation and party discipline by Liberals during the 1945–64 period.

Most Liberal council groups were more organised and cohesive than those studied by Bulpitt. Interviewees were able to provide data concerning the organisation of Liberals on over 30 local authorities in the UK between 1945 and 1964. Liberals on most of the local authorities covered met to discuss policy matters prior to council meetings. In some cases, where Liberal councillors did not meet formally to discuss policy matters, this was due to there being a very small number of councillors, or where the councillors tended to meet

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., p79

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., p80

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., p98

⁹¹⁰ Ibid., p7

informally on a regular basis and where policy disagreements were rarely expected.⁹¹¹ The absence of formal group meetings did not always imply that Liberal councillors acted in an entirely uncoordinated fashion. Some Liberal council groups had a recognised leader, even though they rarely met formally.⁹¹² In such cases, and as Bulpitt found at Rochdale, it is likely that the Liberal council leader was the focus of informal discussions between councillors on policy issues. Liberals on Elland UDC did not meet to discuss policy, but did meet annually in order to plan the allocation of committee chairmanships.⁹¹³

On only a handful of the councils referred to by interviewees did Liberal members specifically refuse to meet as a group, preferring to operate independently.⁹¹⁴ The preponderance of group meetings did not imply that Liberal councillors were usually bound together by formal disciplinary mechanisms, however. The vast majority of interviewees questioned on this issue declared that Liberal councillors were not bound by a whip.⁹¹⁵ Some stated that policy matters were discussed at group meetings, but that no formal expression of opinion was reached.⁹¹⁶ Others emphasised that, although issues were discussed by Liberal councillors, the Liberal group had no leadership capable of enforcing

⁹¹¹ For example, Interviews, John Windmill (Solihull), Angus Macleod (Enfield) and Alan Laurie (Shrewsbury); but see Local Government Newsletter (LPO, No. 16, Aug 63) for an example of a Liberal “shadow council” established on an authority with only two Liberal councillors

⁹¹² For example, Interview, Reg Wrighton (Willenhall)

⁹¹³ Interview, Trevor Wilson

⁹¹⁴ Interviews, Peter Linfoot (Colchester), John Cornwall (Buckingham); and H. Benham, Two Cheers for the Town Hall (Hutchinson, 1964) pp224–5 (Colchester)

⁹¹⁵ For examples, Interviews, Muriel Burton (Oldham), Bill Berry (Batley), Honor Barnard (Wokingham), Freddie Fletcher (Greenock), Derek Gee (Rugby), John G. Gray (Edinburgh), Maurice Jagger (Halifax), David Morrish (Exeter), Dennis Wrigley (Urmston); Southend West LA, Minutes, 13 Jun 58 and Papers, election address of Philip Herbert, Prittlewell ward, Southend, 1963

⁹¹⁶ Interviews, Allan Clegg (Halifax), James Boyd (Greenock); votes at group meetings were criticised in Southend West LA, Minutes, 14 Dec 62

discipline.⁹¹⁷ Donald Wade had described the whipping of local councillors as “undemocratic and illiberal” but not all Liberal council groups abjured formal disciplinary mechanisms.⁹¹⁸ The need for discipline was recognised amongst Liberals on councils where the Party was close to, or aimed seriously for, power.⁹¹⁹ Blackpool’s Liberal councillors were required not to speak against policies which the Liberal group had approved by a two-thirds majority, although they were allowed to vote as they saw fit.⁹²⁰ Decisions taken by Manchester Council’s Liberal group were minuted from 1962–65 and standing orders were drawn up which encapsulated an agreement that councillors could vote against the group line “only in very exceptional circumstances” and could speak against Liberal policy only if it was made clear that they did so in a private capacity.”⁹²¹ A strong personality as Liberal leader could also insist that Liberal councillors adhered to an agreed group policy.⁹²² Even in councils where Liberals did place weight on the need for discipline, the difficulties of enforcing discipline could not be overlooked.⁹²³ It would appear to be difficult to distinguish between the formal whip system which a small minority of Liberal groups employed and more informal disciplinary mechanisms, such as the requirement of

⁹¹⁷ For instance, Interviews, D. F. Burden (Altrincham), Harold Fainlight (Horncastle), Nelia Penman (Sevenoaks) and Trevor Wilson (West Riding)

⁹¹⁸ Local Government Handbook, p25; for similar sentiments to Wade’s see Local Government Newsletter (LPO, No. 6, Sep 61)

⁹¹⁹ For instance, Interviews, Michael Meadowcroft (Southport) and Herbert Ballam (Poole)

⁹²⁰ Local Government Newsletter (LPO, No. 6, Sep 61)

⁹²¹ Manchester Liberal Federation, Liberal Council Group, Minutes, 21 May 62, 5 Feb 63, 21 May 63

⁹²² Interview, Christopher Hall (Newbury)

⁹²³ Interviews, Christopher Hall (Newbury), Michael Meadowcroft (Southport)

Halifax Liberal councillors to clear in advance all of their council speeches with the group leader.⁹²⁴

Before 1960, in the absence of any advice from the Liberal Party Organisation as to how Liberal councillors should organise themselves, Liberals adopted a wide range of approaches once elected to local authorities. Some Liberals set out to establish the Party's credibility at an early stage by appointing a leader and deputy leader and instituting formal group meetings, even when only two Liberal councillors had been elected.⁹²⁵ Others shunned such initiatives, although very few Liberal council groups were entirely uncoordinated. Informal coordination mechanisms were the norm on smaller councils, particularly those where the Liberal councillors already formed a close social clique, the party system was weak, or Liberals represented several scattered wards some distance apart.⁹²⁶ More formal coordination and disciplinary machinery seems to have been more common on larger, more highly politicised authorities, particularly where the Liberal Party was challenging for control, but, in practice, the difference between informal and formal discipline may have been modest. Liberal council groups tended to be more coherently organised in 1964 than twenty years previously, and there is evidence that a younger generation of councillors insisted on the need for local manifestos, group meetings and related innovations.⁹²⁷ Certainly the impression left of Liberal councillors by Bulpitt cannot

⁹²⁴ Interview, Maurice Jagger

⁹²⁵ Interviews, Paul Tyler (Devon), Hilary Carr (Liverpool)

⁹²⁶ For instance, Interview Stan Evans (Brownhills)

⁹²⁷ For instance, David Morrish (Exeter); and call for greater coordination and targeting of resources in Bognor Regis LA, Minutes, 16 May 49

be relied upon as representative of Liberal council groups across the nation during the 1945–64 period.

Appendix to Chapter VI: Political Composition of Local Authorities

METHODOLOGY

Several types of popularly elected local authority existed during the 1945–64 period.⁹²⁸ In England and Wales, outside of London, there were six different forms of local authority. The key division was between county boroughs, the larger towns and cities which were self-contained local government units, and county councils. The latter were sub-divided into non-county boroughs, urban and rural districts (UDCs and RDCs), with different functions exercised by each sub-division. Non-county boroughs, urban and rural districts were themselves divided into parishes which could each have councils. In London, leaving aside the City of London, power was shared between the London County Council and the metropolitan boroughs. Elections were held in 1964 for the Greater London Council, which succeeded the London County Council and covered a larger area than its predecessor, and for new, larger metropolitan boroughs. In Scotland there was a similar division between burghs and county councils, but there were no equivalents to urban and rural district councils.

There were annual elections for county and non-county borough, urban and rural district, and Scottish burgh councils, although usually only part of a council was subject to election

⁹²⁸ For a concise, contemporary guide see W. E. Jackson, Local Government in England and Wales (Penguin, 1945) and (Penguin, “New Edition”, 1959)

in any one year. County councils throughout the UK and metropolitan borough councils were elected every three years. After elections all types of borough, burgh, and county councils elected aldermen (bailies in Scotland) to serve as councillors for fixed terms. A further complication was that Scottish county councils included members elected by the burgh councils within their boundaries. In the analysis in this Chapter, parish councils and the Corporation of the City of London have been excluded and no distinction is made between aldermen and elected councillors (or between their Scottish equivalents).

The data presented in this Chapter has been drawn primarily from The Times, The Scotsman, and the Municipal Year Book. Local newspapers, particularly the Manchester Evening News and the Liverpool Echo were also consulted. The Times reported the party composition of almost all borough councils in England and Wales from 1949 to 1964. Its coverage in earlier years was less comprehensive. It also reported the composition of county councils, although not always consistently, and London election results in some detail. The Scotsman reported the composition of Scottish burghs thoroughly throughout the 1945–64 period, and also reported the composition of county councils, albeit less thoroughly. The composition of all forms of councils was published in the Municipal Year Book from 1955 to 1957 and 1960 to 1964. No data was published in 1959 and details relating to Rural District Councils were omitted in 1958.

Compilation of the information presented in this Chapter raised a number of methodological problems. One of the most significant was due to the fact that the figures produced in the Municipal Year Book were volunteered by local authority clerks. This caused problems where local authorities had poorly-defined or non-existent party systems.

Some officials would record that their councils were non-political, while others would report the known political affiliation of councillors even though they may all have been elected on independent or non-political tickets. This problem was most evident with urban district council data which could not be cross-checked using data published elsewhere and because of the considerable number of “non-political” UDCs. A second problem was that the party compositions published in the national press did not usually take account of aldermanic elections which could significantly alter the party balance. This caused discrepancies between the data published in the press and that in the Municipal Year Book. Thirdly, Conservative and independent councillors were, on some authorities, interchangeable and were sometimes differently described from year to year in the published sources. These problems, and several other more detailed considerations, could be resolved by further research but their impact on the trends in the number and distribution of Liberal councillors, on which this research is intended to focus, would be likely to be modest. It is also necessary to emphasise that the party composition of local authorities changed frequently due to deaths, retirements, by-elections and defections, suggesting that it is not practicable to state with absolute accuracy how many councillors belonging to any particular party there were at any one time.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁹ This factor explains the discrepancies between Tables 1 and 29

POLITICAL COMPOSITION OF ENGLISH AND WELSH BOROUGHES

Table 41: Councillors in English and Welsh Boroughs 1938–64

Year	Total number of boroughs	Boroughs for which results known	Number of Conservative councillors	Number of Labour councillors	Number of Liberal councillors	Number of other councillors
1938	383	141	2,143	2,232	595	1,629
1945	392	121	1,416	2,595	373	1,232
1946	392	71	502	1,121	91	519
1947	392	327	3,256	4,486	583	3,181
1949	392	385	3,944	3,939	495	3,987
1950	393	372	4,525	4,097	442	3,392
1951	393	374	4,809	3,876	410	3,328
1952	393	384	4,483	4,582	353	3,254
1953	393	378	4,250	4,723	315	3,090
1954	396	394	4,284	5,379	304	3,045
1955	402	402	4,621	5,257	328	3,130
1956	402	401	4,452	5,568	292	3,092
1957	402	402	4,247	5,761	304	3,121
1958	402	402	4,011	6,094	349	2,981
1959	402	400	4,171	5,993	379	2,861
1960	402	401	4,572	5,514	434	2,929
1961	401	401	4,778	5,273	519	2,927
1962	401	401	4,346	5,454	885	2,829
1963	401	401	3,879	5,978	967	2,708
1964	401	401	3,683	6,295	868	2,645

It can be seen from Table 41 that only in 1955, 1957, 1958 and the years from 1961 to 1964 was the party composition of all borough councils in England and Wales recorded in either The Times or the Municipal Year Book. However, those borough councils for which party information was not published in either source from 1949 to 1964 were few in number and were mostly councils dominated by independents. Consequently, the total number of Liberal councillors given in Table 41 for 1949–64 can be taken as an accurate reflection of the actual number, including the missing boroughs. The same cannot be said for the totals given in Table 41 for 1938–47, particularly the earlier years. By comparing

those results reported in 1938–47 with those reported in 1949 a measure of the change in the Liberal Party’s fortunes in elections to borough councils in England and Wales can be calculated and, from that, an estimate of the total number of Liberal councillors for each of the years 1938, 1945, 1946 and 1947 can be made. These estimates are reported in Table 42.

Table 42: Estimates of the Total Number of Liberal Councillors 1938–47

Year	Number of Liberal councillors reported	Estimated total number of Liberal councillors
1938	595	1022
1945	373	678
1946	91	421
1947	583	597
1949 (base year)	495	495

Table 41 demonstrates the extent to which local government elections to borough councils in England and Wales were dominated by the political parties. In 1949, 76.5 per cent of councillors on such bodies represented one of the three parties and the number of “other” councillors, primarily comprising independents and anti-Socialists, declined consistently thereafter.

VII. Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the anatomy of the Liberal Party — its constituency and district associations and the activists who ran them — in order to explain how the Party as a whole changed between 1945 and 1964. It has shown that the resilience of the Party's local institutions, and their ability to function independently of Liberal headquarters, as well as a significant influx of new recruits in the late 1940s, were important factors in the survival of the Liberal Party in its bleakest years after 1945. Local activists in several parts of the country changed their focus from parliamentary to municipal elections during the 1950s because of the limited opportunities for the Party to win parliamentary elections and the decline in the Party's electoral credibility. This change in tactics gradually spread throughout the Party, contributing to its revival and changing its character.

Survival of the Liberal Party

One of the main reasons why the Liberal Party remained in existence after 1945 is because its local associations remained in existence. Many LAs consisted solely of a small executive committee and a network of Liberal contacts in outlying parts of the constituency. As long as executive committees continued to meet then LAs retained their corporate identity. Often, LA executive committees remained active because they aimed to improve the Liberal organisation in a constituency in order to pave the way for a Liberal candidate to succeed in a parliamentary election, however unlikely this aim. After the 1950 general election, however, the rationale for LAs to remain in being was severely weakened and the 1951 election, which few LAs could afford to contest and which confirmed that the

Liberal Party was electorally irrelevant in all but a handful of constituencies, precipitated a partial collapse of the Party's local organisation. In many constituencies, LA executive committees stopped meeting, or debated the issue of whether or not to dissolve, or reduced their activities to a bare minimum.⁹³⁰

The Party's decline is apparent from the changing number of Liberal associations which affiliated to the LPO during the 1945–55 period, however organised Liberal activity of some sort continued in around one-half of the constituencies in England, Wales and Scotland at this time.⁹³¹ In many places this reflected the commitment of the Liberal Party's members to its policies and philosophy. Although Liberal supporters in the early 1960s may have been neither aware of nor in agreement with Liberal policy, the results reported in Chapter five show that Liberal policy and philosophy were important motivating factors for the majority of Party members. Without activists' commitment to liberalism and the hope of eventual victory, the Party would not have survived.

There were two other significant local reasons why the Liberal Party survived. Firstly, some LAs remained active during the late 1940s and the 1950s because their focus was primarily on fighting local government elections rather than parliamentary elections. This was particularly true in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, the Liberal Party's local government heartland. In towns such as Rochdale, Littleborough and

⁹³⁰ For example, Dunfermline LA's Executive Committee met just twice in 1952 and held its last meeting on 26 Feb 53; Liberal activity in the Faversham constituency stopped in March 1951; Inverness LA's Executive Committee met on just five occasions between October 1950 and September 1954; Leeds South LA's Executive Committee met only once in 1954; Bognor Regis LA's Executive Committee debated whether it was worth continuing — Minutes, 20 Mar 52; and a "static position in the affairs" of the Leeds Liberal Federation was minuted in April 1950 — Minutes, 24 Apr 50

⁹³¹ See pp11–12

Huddersfield the LAs operated according to an annual timetable centred on the May local elections. Candidate selection was discussed in the autumn; a committee would be formed before Christmas to consider potential candidates and discuss themes for the election campaign; prospective candidates would be selected in the first two months of the year; a final decision on the number of wards to be fought would be made in April at the same time as election addresses were printed; and the results would be dissected by the executive committee in June. The expectation that the Party would contest local elections every year, especially when sitting Liberal councillors were required to defend their seats, created a routine which drove LA executive committees to meet regularly and raise money and thus led to an organised Liberal presence being maintained in several areas. Although in some places, such as Liverpool, the Liberal Party virtually stopped contesting local elections in the decade after 1945 because of consistently poor results, in many smaller towns Liberal candidates were able to win, or come close to winning, council seats as a result of the hard work of a limited number of activists in small wards or arrangements, formal or informal, with one of the two major parties.

Secondly, LAs continued to operate after 1945 in several places, including Kilmarnock and Rugby, despite not having run candidates in parliamentary or local elections for a decade or more. Partly this reflected social reasons to continue with Liberal activity. Whist drives organised ostensibly to raise money for general election campaigns could become the *raison d'être* of LAs and it was not uncommon for more energy to be expended by Liberal activists on the organisation of an annual bazaar than on political activity. Another factor was the need to raise money to maintain property bought during the halcyon days of Victorian liberalism. Local Liberal halls, rooms and, more unusually, clubs helped keep

LAs in being both because they provided a focus for Liberal activity and because their upkeep demanded a steady flow of income.

The Liberal Party would not have survived after 1945 if it had not been able to recruit new members, especially those willing to take an active part in the running of LAs. If the Liberal Party had been forced to rely after 1945 entirely on members recruited before the Second World War, and motivated to work for the Party for social and habitual reasons, then it would have been unlikely to have lasted long enough to revive in the late 1950s. Long-standing members were extremely important components of many LAs, and the minute books of LA executive committees in the 1940s and 1950s are littered with references to stalwart members recruited at the turn of the century and with decades of service as association officers.⁹³² Nevertheless, the cohorts of young activists recruited in the 1945–50 period reinvigorated many LAs, provided a large proportion of the Party's parliamentary candidates in the 1950 and subsequent elections, and also provided the Party with its leaders during the period of revival in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The recruitment campaign organised by the LPO in the late 1940s (and not repeated until the Call for Action campaign in 1961–2) was, therefore, an important factor in the survival of the Party, particularly considering that recruitment all but stopped during the 1950–55 period.

The loose, federal structure of the Liberal Party assisted its survival between 1945 and 1955 and its revival during the 1955–64 period. LAs which were short of funds or activists,

⁹³² Yorkshire Liberal Federation, Minutes, 25 Mar 44 (reference to the death of J. E. Walker, of whom it was said "few Liberals remain today who remember, as he did, the days when Gladstone was a Tory"), Yorkshire Observer, 24 Jul 51 (reference to the death of J. A. Smith, Secretary of East Bowling LA, Bradford, since 1906), Yorkshire Liberal Jubilee, Souvenir Handbook (Yorkshire Liberal Federation, 1953) p24 (reference to the 65 years of service to the Liberal Party in Hull given by T. H. Plowman)

or both, could stop paying a subscription to the LPO without any significant practical consequences resulting from this. Only from the late 1950s onwards was action taken to discourage unaffiliated LAs from adopting parliamentary candidates, for instance.⁹³³ Thus, the rules concerning the constitution and activities of an LA were not rigorously enforced in such a way as to provide a barrier to the establishment of new Liberal organisations or to facilitate the winding-up of existing ones. LAs in decline, such as those at Inverness and Dundee, were able to continue in being for several years without affiliating to the national party, resuming their subscription when their fortunes improved. Strong district LAs, including at Bognor Regis, Dumbarton and Sittingbourne, were able to function for a time as if they were constituency LAs, paying subscriptions to the national party and area federations, considering the adoption of parliamentary candidates, and facilitating the formation of Liberal organisations nearby. Occasionally, as at Kearsley after 1962 and Helensburgh before 1948, district LAs were able to function entirely independently of constituency LAs, enabling Liberal activity to be organised in small corners of constituencies which would otherwise have been dead to the Party.

The role played by LAs in facilitating the survival of the Liberal Party can shed light on the importance of the other factors advanced to explain the Party's persistence, in particular the role of the party leadership and the Party's traditional support in the Celtic fringe. Several commentators have attributed the Liberal Party's survival to the leadership offered by Clement Davies, particularly his decision in 1951 not to accept a position in a

⁹³³ In the run-up to the 1964 general election, the LPO Executive Committee regularly bemoaned the number of unaffiliated LAs which had selected prospective parliamentary candidates, contested local elections and engaged in other activities — Minutes, 30 Jun 62, 21 Mar 64, 29 Jun 64; also LPO Organising Committee, Minutes, 9 Jan 62

Conservative government, and by LPO stalwarts such as Philip Fothergill.⁹³⁴ Could their leadership have secured the future of the Liberal Party if there had been a more widespread collapse of the Party's local organisation after 1950? Such a collapse would have intensified the LPO's financial problems at a time of already dire financial need, both by further reducing the income directly contributed by LAs, and by reducing donations, including those received as a result of the Assembly appeal, as activists left the Party. The Party's local government base, and its ability to contest parliamentary elections, would have been further weakened. In almost every respect, the inheritance bequeathed by Davies to Jo Grimond would have been worse if the Party's local organisation had degenerated even further after 1950. It could be argued that the leadership of Davies and others helped bolster the Party's local organisation, but the evidence from interviews with Liberals active before 1955 does not bear this out. Most activists did not consider Davies an inspiring leader and the majority regarded the Liberal Party's headquarters as a distant body to which they owed a duty of loyalty, but which gave them little in return. Had the Liberal Party's representation in the House of Commons been reduced or eliminated in the decade after 1945, it is likely that the Party would have survived because of its local organisation, although those LAs which did not quickly change their focus from parliamentary to local elections would probably have found it difficult to continue in being. This is not to say that the Party could have prospered if it had lost its remaining seats in Parliament or if Davies had accepted the ministerial position offered by Churchill, but it suggests that the Party's local organisation was, in general, a more important factor in explaining the survival of the Liberal Party than was its leadership.

⁹³⁴ See p27

The deficiencies of the Celtic fringe thesis were outlined in the introductory Chapter. Chapter six makes clear that, although the Liberal MPs mostly represented distant corners of Scotland, Wales and the south west of England, the Party as a whole drew support from a number of different areas of the country, particularly Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. The strength of the Liberal Party's local government base in these counties illustrates one of the defects of the Celtic fringe hypothesis, the Party's ability to challenge for and win parliamentary elections in places such as Huddersfield, Bolton, Rochdale and Colne Valley. Proponents of the Celtic fringe hypothesis have tended to lump towns such as Rochdale in with the Celtic fringe, or to attribute the Party's strength there to peculiarly local factors. In fact, even at its lowest ebb, the Liberal Party could command significant support in parts of England and the revival of the Party in the late 1950s and especially the early 1960s was an English phenomenon.

Some of the reasons why the Liberal Party retained its appeal in parts of Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire have already been identified by Birch.⁹³⁵ There is evidence that the organisation of the Liberal Party also influenced the strength of the Party within these three counties. The speed with which the Liberal Party was able to build its local government base in Blackpool and Kearsley suggests that there was considerable latent support for the Party, especially in Lancashire, which was capable of being mobilised. The Liberal Party also had a track record of representation on local authorities in the counties which lent it a credibility with the electorate which it lacked in other parts of the country. The more successful LAs in the three counties tended to focus on fighting local government elections and were assisted by the small electorates in wards in small and

⁹³⁵ See p16

medium-sized boroughs. Pacts and informal arrangements with the two major parties, particularly the Conservative Party, helped the Liberal Party maintain a presence in local politics in Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire throughout the inter-war and immediate post-war period and were a major factor behind the Party's survival in these counties. Unlike in other parts of the country, particularly Scotland and north east England, cooperation between the Conservative and Liberal Parties did not result in the formation of anti-socialist political organisations — such as Progressive or Municipal associations — which tended to facilitate defections from the Liberal Party to the Conservatives, and led to the erosion of the Liberal Party's political identity.

Revival of the Liberal Party

Explanations of the revival of the Liberal Party in the late 1950s and early 1960s have overlooked the role played by the Party's local organisation, focusing instead on the leadership of Jo Grimond; the rejuvenation of the Party's policies under Grimond's leadership; growing disillusion with the Conservative governments of Eden and Macmillan, especially after the Suez imbroglio; and doubts about the Labour Party's ability to win a general election. Although these are all possible explanations of the overall increase in the Party's support, as shown by opinion polls and the general election results of 1959 and 1964, they do not explain the patchy nature of the Party's revival and the substantial growth of the Party's local government base in areas of the country which had been devoid of Liberal representation for decades.

A key factor in the revival of the Liberal Party was the decision by activists in some constituencies to change their focus from parliamentary to local elections. Sometimes this change was consciously planned and taken, as at Rugby, at the instigation of the town's Young Liberals. Mostly, however, LAs' electoral strategies evolved over a few years. One or two key activists would begin to take local elections seriously or win a local election unexpectedly. At Southend, for example, the Liberal Party's initial breakthrough at local government level occurred as a result of the Labour Party accidentally failing to nominate a candidate for a ward. Once the Liberal Party won, or came within a realistic chance of winning, local elections then expanding the Party's local government base and retaining Liberal council seats automatically became foci of activity for LAs.

There were three reasons why Liberal activists turned their attention from parliamentary to local elections after 1950. Firstly, and most importantly, the Liberal Party had more chance of winning seats on local authorities than in the House of Commons. Very few LAs were sufficiently well organised or financed to win parliamentary elections in the 1945–64 period and those which were had to overcome the Party's low credibility with the electorate, particularly as it was impossible for a Liberal government to be formed after most of the period's general elections because there were too few Liberal candidates at the polls. Candidates in local elections required less organisational and financial backing than parliamentary candidates and, although the Liberal Party's credibility with the electorate could be as weak at local level as at parliamentary level, in many towns local elections could be won with less than 1,000 votes. Put simply, Liberal activists wanted to win something and after 1950 it became starkly apparent that the Party had more chance of

winning in even the most hopeless council ward than in almost any parliamentary constituency in the country.

Secondly, during the 1945–64 period some Liberals increasingly felt their absence from municipal authorities more keenly as councils became increasingly politicised. There were 40 borough councils in England and Wales on which none of the three main parties were represented in 1964, compared to 48 in 1945. The number of councillors not elected as Conservative, Labour or Liberal declined from 3,987 in 1945 to 2,645 in 1964, and the pattern of decline between those two years was almost continual.⁹³⁶ As political parties extended their influence over local government, arguments against Liberal involvement in local elections were weakened. At the same time, the satisfaction of Liberals with local anti-socialist organisations and alliances diminished. Progressive and Municipal associations, which had combined both Conservative and Liberal activists before the Second World War, were increasingly regarded as Conservative dominated after 1945 and this encouraged the re-engagement of Liberals in local politics in several towns and cities, particularly in Scotland. In a related development, younger Liberal activists were keen to break alliances, formal or otherwise, between Liberals and Conservatives in many northern towns and cities. For some, the arrangements were at odds with their political convictions. Others thought that the Liberal Party would prosper in the long term if it could be disassociated from the Conservative Party.⁹³⁷ The declining fortunes of the Liberal Party after 1945 in the town halls of Rochdale, Halifax and Huddersfield, where Liberal/Conservative arrangements were prominent, added credence to this argument.

⁹³⁶ See p326

⁹³⁷ Interviews, Sir Cyril Smith, Trevor Wilson

Thirdly, new recruits to the Liberal Party were instrumental in changing the focus of LAs. Although some of the people recruited to the Party between 1945 and 1950 drifted out of politics after the 1950 election,⁹³⁸ those who remained took over the running of LAs as the pre-war generation retired or died. In the areas where the Party revived at local government level, key leaders, mostly recruited between 1945 and 1950, were primarily responsible. Had there not been a flow of recruits into the Party at the time of the 1945 election, and especially if the national recruitment campaign of the late 1940s had not occurred, it is likely that the revival of the Liberal Party would have been less significant.

Another cadre of young recruits — who joined the Liberal Party in the mid-1950s, mostly before signs of revival were visible — also played an important part in the Party's revival. The Oxbridge educated Liberals who formed and joined the New Orbits group laid the foundations for the rewriting of Liberal Party policy by Jo Grimond and helped improve the Party's media presentation, particularly in relation to the annual Assembly and the Party's publications. Another Young Liberal group, active at the same time in north west England, concentrated on fighting local government elections in the Manchester area. It has already been remarked upon that, whereas the number of Liberal councillors in the West Riding of Yorkshire was slightly smaller in 1963 than in 1949, the number of Liberal councillors in Lancashire and Cheshire was 59 per cent greater in 1963 than fourteen years previously. The difference in the performance of the Liberal Party at local government level in its strongest areas was at least partly due to the activities of Dennis Wrigley, Alan Share and the other Manchester Young Liberals who themselves contested and won local elections in Manchester and its satellite towns and also encouraged the formation of LAs

⁹³⁸ Interviews, Donald Newby, David Ridley

and Young Liberal groups, and their participation in local politics, throughout the north west.

By placing a new emphasis on local government elections after 1950, Liberal activists were not, usually, neglecting parliamentary elections. The Rugby Liberals were not alone in believing that winning local elections was a route to winning parliamentary elections. Increased involvement in local government elections tended to help increase recruitment to the Liberal Party, and improve the Party's organisation, finances and image. All of these factors spurred LAs into selecting parliamentary candidates and helps explain the increased number of constituencies fought by the Party in 1959 and 1964 and the Party's performance in the 1964 election.⁹³⁹ It was rare for LAs to ignore parliamentary elections in order to concentrate on local politics, or for there to be disputes within LAs about the priority to be given to parliamentary elections. Parliamentary elections could contribute directly to LAs' local election strategies, for example by providing an opportunity for previously untouched wards to be canvassed. More importantly, Liberals tended to regard parliamentary elections as important in themselves. There was no challenge before 1964 to the notion that the Liberal Party's main aim was to win power at national level by winning a majority of the seats in the House of Commons.

An important aspect of the Liberal Party's revival at local government level was the development of new methods of electioneering. Most significant was the distribution of leaflets outside electoral campaigns to report on council policy and the work of Liberal

⁹³⁹ H. B. Berrington, "The General Election of 1964" (*Journal of the Royal Historical Society*, Series A, Vol. 128, 1965) pp17–66, provides evidence of a link between the Liberal Party's performance in local and parliamentary elections

councillors, which sometimes invited comments from electors, particularly suggestions of new issues which Liberal councillors could tackle. One myth which has gained credence through repetition in recent years is that grumble sheets, especially the Focus newsletters now widely used by the Liberal Democrats, were invented in Liverpool.⁹⁴⁰ In fact, as discussed in Chapter six, such techniques first emerged in towns such as Rugby and Southend in the mid-1950s and were only developed in Liverpool from around 1962.

Not all Liberals adopted a new approach to local government after 1950. The changes outlined above largely by-passed Scotland, except for a few burghs, Wales, rural England, and the inner cities. The Liberals' local government resurgence was primarily English and suburban. Although there are a few examples of LAs reforming after decades of inactivity in inner cities such as Birmingham, for the most part the Liberal Party's local government-led revival took place in areas in which the Party had retained some degree of organisation after 1945. This can be shown in a number of ways. The Liberal Party's local government revival was modest in Scotland, London and in the English county councils, and there was a decline in the Party's local government position in Wales between 1949 and 1963. Of the 77 English and Welsh boroughs with a population of over 50,000 without Liberal councillors in 1949, 44 remained devoid of Liberal councillors fourteen years later. There were only twenty Liberal councillors in 1963 (around one per cent of the total number) in the 78 English, Welsh and Scottish constituencies not contested by the Liberal Party during the 1945–64 period (12.5 per cent of the total number of such constituencies).⁹⁴¹ Nine of

⁹⁴⁰ For instance see Liberal Democrat News, 11 Aug 2000, p8

⁹⁴¹ These seats exclude Blackburn West, Preston South, Southampton Itchen and Dundee East which were not contested by Liberals after they were created in 1948 because their predecessor two-Member constituencies were fought in 1945 and which were all devoid of Liberal councillors in 1963. A further six constituencies were only contested by the Liberal Party in by-elections during this period. There were fifteen Liberal councillors in these seats in 1963, all but one in the borough of Mossley. See pp11–12

these sat on Ormskirk UDC and in no other such constituency were there more than two Liberal councillors in 1963.

The rapid growth of the Liberal Party's local government base in south east England in the early 1960s provides further evidence of the influence of local organisation on the strength of the Party at that time. The development of the Liberal Party in Orpington — where the Liberals took control of the council before winning the parliamentary seat — cannot easily be explained by reference to religious factors, the appeal of the Party's economic policies, one-off protest voting, or by likening the town to Britain's Celtic fringe. The reason the Liberal Party was successful in Orpington, while it made little impact in nearby towns such as Croydon, is that a small group of hard-working activists revived the town's Liberal association after 1955 and focused on winning local elections, building up the Party's organisation, and then using the Party's local government base as a platform for success in parliamentary elections.

There were a number of reasons why new electoral strategies were not developed by the Liberal Party in many places before 1964. There were over forty constituencies in which the Liberal Party won a parliamentary contest between 1945 and 1964, or finished second and came within 6,000 votes of victory. In most of these, especially in peripheral regions of the UK, Liberal activists saw no reason to alter their electoral strategy in favour of focusing on local government. The exceptions to this rule were seats in which the Liberal Party did well at the parliamentary level as a result of local success, of which Orpington is the prime example, and Bolton West and Huddersfield West which the Liberals won in exceptional circumstances. Secondly, there were numerous constituencies in which there

was no LA between 1945 and 1964 or where Liberal organisations were weak and lacked dynamic leadership. Where Liberal organisations existed in such seats, their main aim was to survive rather than to win elections. Thirdly, there were many areas of the country, primarily rural, where there was a tradition of non-partisan local politics which Liberals were reluctant to challenge. This included areas where the Labour Party had entered local elections, but in which the Conservative and Liberal Parties had not. These areas overlapped to some extent with the constituencies which the Liberal Party felt it had a chance of winning at the parliamentary level. Liberal activists in Cornwall North, for instance, were disinclined towards fighting local elections both because party politics was not generally a feature of Cornish local government before 1964 and because they felt that the Party had a realistic chance of winning the parliamentary seat irrespective of its position in local government. Consequently, some Liberals were opposed to the growing emphasis placed on fighting local government elections, especially if it drew attention away from the Party's main parliamentary focus or if it threatened to undermine existing non-partisan or Conservative/Liberal arrangements in their areas. LA officials and parliamentary candidates occasionally spoke out against the introduction of "parish pump politics",⁹⁴² and the local government conferences organised by the LPO's Local Government Department in the early 1960s, and the Department's Local Government Newsletter, included some lively debates on the Liberal attitude to local government.⁹⁴³

Before considering the significance of the contribution to the revival of the Liberal Party made by the strategic decisions of Liberal activists, it is necessary to emphasise that these

⁹⁴² For an early example see Enfield West LA, Minutes, 28 Apr 53. Also Interview, David Mills

⁹⁴³ For instance see Local Government Newsletter, LPO, Nos. 6 (May 61), 12 (Oct 62), 13 (Dec 62) especially article by V. Frowen on independent councillors, and 17 (Nov 63)

were taken without any influence being exerted by the LPO or Liberal parliamentarians. As has been discussed, until the Local Government Department began its work in 1960, the attitude of Liberal headquarters to local government was a mixture of ignorance and apathy. Few of the Liberal Party's leaders saw any connection between the Party's local government position and its ability to contest parliamentary elections more successfully. When Liberals in towns such as Rugby and Southend began taking local elections more seriously and developing new methods of electioneering in the mid-1950s, the LPO's main concern was with establishing its financial viability, and the Liberal parliamentary party barely existed. Neither of these bodies had a role to play in the beginnings of the Party's dramatic change of direction. A key turning-point, however, came with the establishment of the Local Government Department as a result of the conviction of Richard Wainwright, then a prominent candidate and later a Liberal MP, that there was a clear link between the Party's local government base and its position in Westminster. The Local Government Department played a hugely significant role in bringing Liberal local government activists together, propagating new electioneering ideas, and encouraging LAs throughout the UK to pay more attention to local politics, paving the way for the formation of the Association of Liberal Councillors later in the 1960s.

Changing Character of the Liberal Party

PARTY LEADERSHIP

The leadership of the Liberal Party had not, by 1964, been radically affected by the changes undergone by the grass roots of the Liberal Party since 1945. Most of the Liberal

MPs of the 1945–64 period represented constituencies in which party politics played little part in local government and there were no Liberal councillors elected under the party banner, although it is often alleged that many of the independent councillors in areas such as west Wales and the Scottish Highlands were Liberal supporters.⁹⁴⁴ As a consequence, Liberal parliamentarians in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not generally see that there was any connection between local and parliamentary elections and paid little attention to the results of local elections and the Liberal Party's position in local government. This situation changed gradually from the late 1950s onwards, but the attitude of Liberal parliamentarians to local politics was only a little more advanced in 1964 than twenty years earlier.

None of the Liberal activists responsible for changing the Party's electoral strategy at local level, was elected to Parliament before 1964. Several, however, became prominent members of the Liberal Party's Council and Executive, or came to hold senior positions in the Party's area federations, and helped to change the character of these institutions between 1945 and 1964. Fewer regular attenders of the Party Council had titles, and more were councillors, in 1964 than nineteen years earlier. By the early 1960s area federations had a greater role in encouraging LAs to fight local elections than previously, including by organising conferences of local candidates and helping to propagate good practice in electioneering. Nevertheless, apart from the reports from Michael Meadowcroft, local elections were rarely discussed by the LPO Standing or Organising Committee, the body which directed the LPO's activities on a day-to-day basis, after 1960.

⁹⁴⁴ J. Stanyer, Understanding Local Government (Fontana, 1976) p85 propounds this view

LIBERAL COUNCILLORS

The characteristics of Liberal councillors changed dramatically between 1945 and 1964. A typical Liberal councillor in 1945 would have been relatively old — over 40 or 50 years of age — and would have first been elected at least ten years before. His election would have owed more to his standing in the community, a network of friends and associates, and individual effort than to the appeal of his party label or the activities of a Liberal association. Almost certainly he would not have had to fight both Labour and Conservative candidates for his seat and he would probably have benefited from some form of arrangement with the Conservative Party in order to be re-elected. It is likely that his only contributions to his local LA would have been an annual donation and a speech, perhaps at the annual general meeting or at the meeting where he, or a colleague, would be formally adopted as Liberal candidate for the council seat. He would have been unlikely to play an active role in general election campaigns and would have made no contribution to the work of the area Liberal federation or the national party. On the council, the Liberals would have rarely met as a group and certainly never to agree a group line. Liberal council groups were often deeply split between older councillors and aldermen who were Conservatives in all but name, and younger councillors who, although often benefiting from arrangements with the Conservatives, sought to remain independent. The predominant political themes of Liberal councillors at this time tended to be anti-socialism and retrenchment and they were sometimes attacked for being indistinguishable from Conservatives. On some local authorities formerly strong Liberal groups were reduced in 1945 to just one or two almost entirely inactive members; elsewhere a solitary Liberal would occasionally be returned

unexpectedly, but such Liberals rarely made any impact on the council or on the locality's Liberal organisation.

Liberal councillors could not be characterised in this manner twenty years later. Their age profile was more balanced, with more councillors in their twenties and thirties. Most Liberal councillors in 1964 had been elected within the preceding four years and electoral arrangements with other parties were the exception rather than the rule. The average Liberal councillor in 1964 was likely to play an active role in his (or, more likely than before, her) LA, and may have been a key figure in its revival during the 1950s. He was also likely to be, or have been, the LA's representative to the Liberal area federation and would probably be a regular attender of the Liberal Party's annual Assembly. He may have harboured ambitions of standing for Parliament. His election to the local council was still likely to have been based on his own campaigning efforts, but the Liberal Party's higher profile, both locally and nationally, helped. Ward issues — cracked pavements and local planning policy — will have comprised most of the contents of his election address and subsequent report-back leaflets to residents. There would be some coordination of local election campaigns across the local authority area, possibly including a local manifesto. The Liberal councillors would meet as a group and try to formulate a group line on key issues, although there would be no disciplinary mechanisms in place and little coordination or consultation with LA activists who were not councillors. Liberal council groups would tend to have more in common, politically, with Labour than Conservative council groups in 1964, but Liberals in different areas advocated different policies, particularly on issues such as the introduction of comprehensive education. One issue on which almost all

Liberals were united was the introduction of greater transparency into councils' proceedings, especially the admission of the press and public to council meetings.

In 1945 local government was of marginal relevance to all but a handful of LAs and Liberal councillors were not closely integrated into the formal structures of the Liberal Party, both national and local. By 1964, however, local government was a central aspect of the work of LAs and Liberal councillors were often senior LA officials, area federation officials, or parliamentary candidates. This fundamental change altered the character of the Liberal Party during the years from 1945 to 1964.

LIBERAL ASSOCIATIONS

The key change to LAs between 1945 and 1964 — the new emphasis placed on local government — has already been discussed. A number of other important changes, some resulting from the new emphasis placed on local government, also occurred during this period.

In many ways, the Liberal Party's membership in 1964 was similar to that in 1945, being predominantly male, middle-class, reasonably well educated, and employed in professional or white collar occupations. It was almost certainly larger in 1964 than in 1945, although membership records were not kept by the Party's headquarters.⁹⁴⁵ Despite this expansion in numbers, the Liberal Party was not able by 1964 to broaden its appeal beyond those groups from which its members tended to be drawn in 1945.

⁹⁴⁵ See p12

There were considerable differences between the typical Liberals of 1964 and those of nineteen years earlier, however. Firstly, the typical Liberal member of 1964 had been recruited within the last five years, mostly as a result of the recruitment and canvassing work of other party workers in the area. There were relatively few Liberals in 1964 who had joined the Party ten or more years earlier. A far higher proportion of Liberals in 1945 had been members of the Party for ten or more years, reflecting the low level of recruitment by the Party during the years from 1929–45. Most LAs remained dependent during those lean years on the efforts of a handful of dedicated activists recruited in the 1920s or earlier and a significant cadre of young recruits who joined them after 1945 were instrumental in ensuring that the Party survived its 1950–55 nadir.

Secondly, Liberal members in 1945 tended to combine a strong commitment to the Liberal Party and a notion (often highly individual) of liberalism with a lack of dynamism which led to regular criticism of LA executive committees by younger Liberal activists, area federations and the LPO that they lacked the impetus to turn fine words about the importance of liberalism into active political work.⁹⁴⁶ This combination was reversed in 1964. As the membership records from Newbury LA suggest,⁹⁴⁷ membership of the Party was more fluid than before, and most Liberal members joined the Party for a year or two before failing to renew their subscriptions, often because they were not collected for some reason. LAs tended to be far more active in 1964 than in 1945, however, with activists often combining extensive programmes of social activities with council work, preparations

⁹⁴⁶ For example, Leeds North West LA decided to suspend its activities in November 1950 on account of the ineffective leadership of the Party and Leeds Central LA threatened to withdraw from the Leeds Liberal Federation in 1953 because insufficient support had been offered to local election candidates — Leeds Liberal Federation, Minutes, 29 Nov 50, 15 Apr 53, 24 Jun 53

⁹⁴⁷ See pp121–2

for a general election, and involvement in area and national Liberal bodies. This was partly a function of the Party's successes during the 1959–64 period and the fact that most activists in 1964 had been recruited at a time when the Liberal Party was becoming more successful, rather than at a time of unrelenting failure. It was also the case, however, that the calibre of Liberal Party members in 1964 was, on average, higher than that in 1945.

The financial base of the Liberal Party also changed significantly between 1945 and 1964. At all levels, the Liberal Party in 1945 was unduly dependent on substantial subscriptions and donations from a small number of rich benefactors. The Party had considerably broadened its financial base by 1964, with regular small subscriptions and income from social events providing the resources with which district and constituency LAs were financed and quota schemes being used to channel resources upwards through the Party organisation to area and national bodies. The Party's financial problems were not solved by 1964, however. Many LAs were reliant for the bulk of their income on a handful of large social events which could easily fail, for instance if the weather was bad, and the quota scheme used to finance the LPO ran into considerable difficulties during the late 1960s when many LAs scaled back their activities.⁹⁴⁸

The style of political campaigning by the Liberal Party was very different in 1964 from that of 1945. In 1945, the Liberals' parliamentary election campaigns were based on a programme of speaker meetings organised for the Liberal candidate. It was not unusual for a campaign to consist of a series of meetings addressed by the candidate and a few helpers and an election address, with a small amount of canvassing fitted in. The decline in

⁹⁴⁸ See The Liberal Crusade: People Count (LPO, [1966]) p35

attendance of political public meetings ended this form of electioneering and required LAs to organise more extensive campaigns, with greater emphasis placed on canvassing. After 1950 it was no longer possible for the Party to harbour hopes of winning constituencies with campaigns centred around the candidate assisted by less than ten helpers. By 1964, it was common for parliamentary election campaigns to be more closely aligned with local election campaigns. Parliamentary candidates sometimes helped out in local election campaigns and targeted their efforts on key marginal wards, or areas of constituencies in which the Party hoped to make progress at local level, something that did not typically occur in 1945. The Liberal Party's parliamentary by-election machine also developed during the 1945–64 period. The importance of attracting a large number of workers from around the country, as well as trained agents and publicists, to by-election campaigns was increasingly recognised from the 1951 Parliament onwards, due to a growing realisation of the good publicity which could result from promising by-election results, awareness that few LAs could organise a decent parliamentary election campaign without assistance, and the success of university “commando raids” whereby an influx of Liberal students into a constituency could help with recruitment and organisational work. The occasional good results achieved in by-elections by the Liberal Party from Inverness in 1954 onwards generated their own momentum which helped precipitate the by-election victories of the 1955 and 1959 Parliaments.

CONCLUSION

In general, the Liberal Party was a very different beast in 1964 from that of 1945. At the close of the Second World War the Party was still in decline, with no realistic prospect of

revival. Its membership was stale and lacking in inspiration, its organisation had run down continually since the 1920s without reform or innovation, its finances were guaranteed by a small band of ageing benefactors, and its strategic outlook was rooted in a backward glance to the great parliamentary triumph of 1906. Although there are many points of similarity between the Party of 1945 and that of nineteen years later, in reality it had undergone a quiet revolution. Its membership was much larger and more vibrant, although new recruits brought new problems of membership retention. Its organisation was more dynamic, and more financially secure, although the structure of the Party was largely unchanged. A new political strategy had emerged from the constituencies which placed much greater emphasis on the importance of local elections and local political issues and which saw success at local level as a route to winning parliamentary elections. The fallacy that the Liberal Party could win a general election if sufficient candidates were put forward to enable a Liberal government to be formed was cast aside after the 1950 election, although dreams of another 1906 were temporarily revived by the Orpington by-election result.⁹⁴⁹ In fact, the Orpington by-election demonstrated the importance of the link between local and parliamentary electioneering. These changes set the Liberal Party on a wholly new political course and indicate that the 1945–64 period was one of central importance to the history of the Party, and to British politics as a whole.

⁹⁴⁹ Ashmore Papers, letter from T. Nudds, Secretary of the LCA, to B. Ashmore, 10 May 62, in which Nudds wrote, "The political situation has altered dramatically since we last met. Whereas we thought we might well take the place of Labour, now it looks as if Labour might win, with us in a position of 20 or so seats and possibly holding the balance ... things are so much in the balance that the time after next could well turn itself into another 1906"

Community Politics

A significant factor in the recent history of the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats was the advent and development of community politics, which is defined in the seminal 1970 Liberal Assembly resolution as involving “a dual approach to politics, acting both inside and outside the institutions of the political establishment” to “help organise people in communities to take and use power”, to use political skills to “redress grievances” and “to represent people at all levels of the political structure”. The resolution also called for “the creation of a Liberal organisation in every constituency” to facilitate “a plan to contest the next general election on the broadest possible front”.⁹⁵⁰ The resolution was the first comprehensive statement of the Party’s strategy to be debated and passed by the Assembly.

Conventional wisdom dictates that community politics was first devised by the Young Liberals of the late 1960s, who scored an important success in 1970 by persuading the Liberal Assembly to accept community politics as an election strategy. Cook, in his history of the modern Liberal Party, has written that “the roots of ... ‘community politics’ lay in student and radical disillusion with the Labour government after 1964. Experience in direct action campaigns and demonstrations convinced many young activists — particularly in the YLs — that the only way to secure effective change was at grass-roots, community level”.⁹⁵¹ Gyford and James described community politics as “a synthesis of the views of the right-wing party establishment and the Red Guard of the Young Liberals”.⁹⁵² The 1970

⁹⁵⁰ Policy Resolutions of the LPO Assembly, 1970

⁹⁵¹ C. Cook, A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900–92 (Macmillan, 1993) p149; see also for similar comments J. Stevenson, Third Party Politics since 1945 (Blackwell, 1993) pp53–4 and A. Sykes, The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776–1988 (Longman, 1997) p258

⁹⁵² J. Gyford and M. James, National Parties and Local Politics (George Allen & Unwin, 1983) p71

Assembly was certainly an important turning-point in the Party's history, but can it fairly be said that community politics was a wholly new development which emerged from the political radicalism of the late 1960s? This thesis provides evidence that the practice of community politics, if not the theory, had deeper roots in the Party and that community politics was essentially a campaigning device rather than a new form of liberalism which could have flowered only in the Liberal Party.

Several interviewees, when asked about their attitude to community politics, expressed the view that they practised community politics long before the term was invented and popularised.⁹⁵³ Some of the key aspects of the 1970 resolution were evident in the political approach of some Liberal activists ten or fifteen years earlier. There was a clear commitment to redressing local grievances in the work of Liberal activists and councillors in many areas of revival, such as Southend, Rugby and Greenock; many Liberals in the 1950s and early 1960s were also keen to represent people at all levels of the political structure, both by breaking with local tradition to contest local elections and by seeking to become more active in non-partisan spheres, such as on magistrates' benches and boards of school governors. A dual approach to politics was also evident in places like Kearsley and Liverpool where there was a significant cross-over between single-issue protest groups and the Liberal Party. Electioneering methods closely associated with community politics but not mentioned in the 1970 resolution, such as non-partisan report-back leaflets and grumble sheets, were developed in the 1950s and long predated the activities of the Young Liberals of the late 1960s.⁹⁵⁴ The concept of Liberal politicians as community leaders rather

⁹⁵³ See p274

⁹⁵⁴ MacIver has described Focus leaflets as the "main instrument of the community politics strategy" — D. MacIver (ed.) The Liberal Democrats (Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996) p178

than partisan members of the political establishment arguably has a longer pedigree, particularly in Bethnal Green as a result of the activities of Sir Percy Harris,⁹⁵⁵ who followed in the tradition of E. H. Pickersgill, Liberal Member for the constituency before the First World War, who was described by Pelling as “a barrister who specialised in working men’s problems”.⁹⁵⁶

The argument advanced above is not intended to underestimate the significance of the Young Liberals of the late 1960s to the development of the Liberal Party. Their fresh thinking about the relationship between liberalism and socialism, drawing on philosophers from Marx to T. H. Green, and on the Liberal Party’s traditional emphasis on parliamentary democracy, gave the Party its first ideological overhaul since the 1920s. They developed a theory of community politics which underpinned the practice and techniques developed some years before and which gave liberalism a new impetus. Moreover, one key aspect of the 1970 resolution — the concept of Liberals taking power in order to transfer it back to communities — had never been implemented by the few Liberal controlled councils of the 1950s or 1960s. Devolution of power to neighbourhood units was a concept developed after 1970 in order to put the theory of community politics into action, and may not have been relevant in some of the small local authorities controlled by the Liberals before then. Nevertheless, the link between the theory of community politics and the practice of Liberals fighting local elections on ward issues using innovative techniques depended upon the prior existence of the latter practice.⁹⁵⁷

⁹⁵⁵ See p274

⁹⁵⁶ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p47

⁹⁵⁷ One proof that the Young Liberals of the late 1960s were not the originators of the practice of community politics in local government, and were not initially interested in local government, is that local elections were not mentioned in the influential Blackpool Essays, T. Greaves (ed.) (Gunfire, 1967)

Finally, an important question to be addressed is whether community politics was a peculiarly Liberal phenomenon — a modern expression of liberalism — or a strategy employed by political activists more generally who were unable to achieve power by the conventional route of winning parliamentary elections. Some theorists concerned with community politics saw the phenomenon as “libertarian” rather than Liberal. Simon Hebditch, writing in 1976, linked community politics to the Levellers and Diggers of the seventeenth century, early nineteenth century radicals, and the suffragettes, as well as a host of continental groups.⁹⁵⁸ Mole has quoted Joseph Chamberlain in his discussion of the foundations of community politics.⁹⁵⁹ A Liberal Assembly resolution of 1973 described community politics as “both a practical expression of the essence of liberalism and a theme that unites a considerable body of Liberal policy”.⁹⁶⁰

No doubt many councillors of all parties would, in the 1950s and 1960s, have claimed to be as close to their local communities as Liberal councillors and Hain has warned of the danger of confusing “good, solid constituency work” with genuine community politics.⁹⁶¹ Nevertheless, a distinctive feature of the new emphasis placed on local government politics by Liberals in the 1950s and 1960s was the regular invitation to electors to help set the agenda of local political debate by indicating the issues on which they wished to see action and the report-back leaflets, usually non-partisan in nature, issued outside electioneering periods by Liberal councillors. These were not tactics used by Conservative or Labour

⁹⁵⁸ P. Hain (ed.) Community Politics (John Calder, 1976) Chapter two

⁹⁵⁹ In V. Bogdanor (ed.) Liberal Party Politics (Clarendon Press, 1983) p259

⁹⁶⁰ Policy Resolutions of the LPO Assembly, 1973, and see MacIver, The Liberal Democrats, p177 and P. Hain, Radical Liberalism and Youth Politics (LPO Strategy 2000 Series, No. 3) p14

⁹⁶¹ P. Hain, Radical Regeneration (Quartet, 1975) p156

councillors during this period and, although Bulpitt has emphasised the extent to which local politics were, in practice, not driven by ideological concerns, both major parties regularly played out their national, ideological battle during local election campaigns.⁹⁶²

Although the two major parties did not employ the tactics increasingly used by Liberals at local government level during the 1950s and 1960s, they were employed by the Fife Socialist League (FSL) during the same period. The FSL was a Communist Party splinter group formed by Lawrence Daly in 1956 in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary.⁹⁶³ Although its aims were national and international, its political strategy was primarily local in outlook. Daly was elected a member of Fife County Council for Ballingry in 1958, it being argued in his election address that he "has helped hundreds of people in the locality on a variety of questions — house repairs, pensions, insurance benefits and so on. He could pursue these and other matters even more efficiently if he was our councillor".⁹⁶⁴ Once elected, Daly sent regular report-back leaflets to his electors which dealt entirely with local issues and, unlike their Liberal counterparts, included outspoken attacks on Daly's political opponents.⁹⁶⁵ He also held two public meetings every year at which he gave a verbal report on his activities to his electors and invited criticism and suggestions for future action.⁹⁶⁶ Other FSL members advocated community politics

⁹⁶² Bulpitt, Party Politics in English Local Government, concluding Chapter

⁹⁶³ Fife Socialist League, Minutes, 24 Feb 57 and Daly Papers, letter from L. Daly and I. Christie to Friendship, 1957 (reference, MSS302/3/11 and 12)

⁹⁶⁴ Daly Papers, leaflet entitled "To the electors of Ballingry", 13 May 58 (reference MSS302/3/12)

⁹⁶⁵ Daly Papers, "Ballingry Bulletin", No. 2, Jul 59 (reference MSS302/3/11)

⁹⁶⁶ Daly Papers, "The Socialist", Vol. 1, No. 6, Sep 60, p2 (reference MSS302/3/16)

techniques and ideas in their election material.⁹⁶⁷ The FSL did not win any elections outside of Ballingry, although it often polled respectably, and Daly's attempt to win the Fife West parliamentary constituency in 1959 was unsuccessful.⁹⁶⁸ The key problems identified by FSL activists were that the League was "pretty vague about policy" and that there existed no enthusiasm to expand the FSL into a national organisation and Daly wound up the League in 1962 as a result, calling on his supporters to work for a Labour victory at the next general election and to seek to change Labour from within.⁹⁶⁹ The FSL's history shows that there was nothing exclusively Liberal about community politics; the tactics employed by the FSL were exactly the same as those used by Liberals in areas such as Rugby, Southend and Liverpool. Such tactics were used to win local elections by candidates who lacked substantial political organisation and needed to differentiate their stance from those of candidates of the major parties by identifying themselves almost entirely with ward issues. Although theoretical links between the practice of community politics and liberalism or related political thought systems could be constructed, other political traditions on the fringe of mainstream politics could also develop community politics to serve their own strategic interests.

⁹⁶⁷ Daly Papers, election material by Alfred Wright (Ward 3, Buckhaven and Methil), Patrick Reddington (Lochare ward, Lochgelly), Alexander McHale (Halbeath ward, Dunfermline), George McDonald (Ballingry) 1961 (reference MSS302/3/16)

⁹⁶⁸ Daly took 10.7 per cent of the vote, outpolling the Communist candidate

⁹⁶⁹ Daly Papers, confidential memorandum from Edward Thompson to John Stewart and Stuart Hall, 1959, and letter from L. Daly to friends, 12 Sep 62 (references MSS302/3/13 and 18)

Political Activism

Academic debate has raged for decades on the subject of whether or not local activism exerts a significant influence over electors' political decisions. A common argument has been that national political campaigns, played out nightly on television screens and dominated by national party leaders, have entirely eclipsed local campaigning — Butler and Kavanagh wrote in 1992, for example, that “it is hard to locate evidence of great benefits being reaped by the increasingly sophisticated and computerised local campaigning”.⁹⁷⁰ On the other hand, there is a solid body of evidence from the United States that local campaigning influences election results there and Seyd and Whiteley's studies of Labour and Conservative Party activists in the UK both concluded that activism influenced voting behaviour.⁹⁷¹ There has not been a study of the impact of Liberal activists on election results, although since the 1997 general election commentators such as Seyd and Whiteley have suggested that “the Party's steady electoral progress over the past two decades owes a lot to the dedicated campaigning activities of its members at the local level”.⁹⁷²

This thesis offers evidence that the strategic decisions, and subsequent campaigning efforts, of Liberal activists in the 1950s and 1960s strongly influenced local election results, and also sometimes affected parliamentary election results. Where Liberals chose

⁹⁷⁰ D. E. Butler and D. Kavanagh, The British General Election of 1992 (Macmillan, 1992) p245

⁹⁷¹ For good surveys see P. Whiteley and P. Seyd, Labour's Grass Roots (Clarendon Press, 1992) pp174–99 and P. Whiteley, P. Seyd, and J. Richardson, True Blues (Clarendon Press, 1994) Chapter 8

⁹⁷² P. Whiteley and P. Seyd, “How to win a landslide by really trying: the effects of local campaigning on voting in the British general election of 1997”, Paper, presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1999; and see also J. Curtice and M. Steed in D. E. Butler and D. Kavanagh, The British General Election of 1997 (Macmillan, 1997) p311

to take local government elections seriously, developed a strategy for fighting them on a consistent basis each year, and devised a political approach geared towards winning such elections which included distinctive new electioneering techniques, they tended to be more successful than where local elections were fought on a sporadic basis, without the full backing of the LA and in a traditional manner. The growth in the strength of the Liberal Party at local government level in places such as Southend and Greenock cannot be credibly explained without reference to the strategies adopted by the local Liberal activists and the work they put in to fight local elections, particularly when such towns are compared to similar localities where the Liberal Party made little or no impact during the 1945–64 period. The relevance of other factors, such as the traditional strength of liberalism in some areas, and the revival of the national Liberal Party under Jo Grimond, should not be discounted but, at local government level, local activism was the main variable influencing the success of the Party. Liberal activists were strongly convinced that their campaigning efforts made the difference between success and failure at local level and many interviewees attributed their victories in local elections to their own campaigning work, often spread over a period of years.

The influence of Liberal activism on parliamentary election results is less easily discernible. Some examples exist of Liberal success at local government level influencing parliamentary election results, most notably at Orpington, but often promising performances in local elections did not lead to parliamentary election victories. The Liberal vote in Rugby and Greenock fell between 1959 and 1964 and the improved results achieved in constituencies such as Southend West, Liverpool Wavertree, Finchley and West Ham were not sufficient to turn unwinnable seats into marginals from the Liberal

perspective. Several factors explain this difference in the impact Liberal activism had on local and parliamentary elections. Firstly, parliamentary elections were often fought on different issues from local elections, and the Liberal Party's national policies were often poorly communicated to the electorate or not popular. Secondly, the electoral system often squeezed Liberal candidates in parliamentary elections, even where an active and well-organised LA existed. This was particularly evident in Rugby, a marginal parliamentary constituency. Thirdly, the Liberal Party was rarely able to build its local government strength throughout an entire constituency and even in towns such as Greenock where the Party developed a strong local government base there were areas of the parliamentary constituency without a Liberal organisation. The Liverpool Wavertree constituency, for example, comprised four wards in which the Liberal organisation ran from strong (for example, in Church ward) to weak (for example, in Old Swan ward) in 1964. Finally, small Liberal campaign teams were capable of winning small wards in local elections but the Party lacked the resources to take on the generally larger and more efficient Labour and Conservative organisations in large, urban wards and, especially, in parliamentary constituencies. This factor was particularly noticeable in the Liberals' disastrous performance in the 1964 Greater London Council elections. Liberal seats in small wards in the boroughs of Friern Barnet, Finchley, Hendon, West Ham, Orpington and elsewhere in London were swallowed up inside larger wards for the purposes of the GLC. Lacking the capacity to fight elections effectively across larger areas, where the efforts of one or two key activists were not sufficient, the Party saw its representation across the capital dramatically reduced. This is a key reason why the Liberal Party failed to translate its local government successes of the early 1960s into a significant breakthrough in the 1964 general election.

Conclusion

The period from 1945 to 1964 included the Liberal Party's nadir when, during the early 1950s, the survival of the Party was in doubt. By 1964 there was no doubt that the Party would continue in existence, although its future electoral prospects were uncertain. During the period of survival and revival Liberal activists began to change the character of the Party, focusing on local government and new styles of campaigning. This development, with which the national party was beginning to catch up by 1964, was the precursor of the community based campaigning which was embraced fully by the Party after 1970. Thus, the Liberal Party did not simply survive and revive during the period from 1945–64: it underwent a period of re-invention which has left its mark on future decades.

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Leslie Anderson*	Salford and Prestwich LAs 1950s	13 Jul 97
Brian Ashmore	Oxford University Liberal Club (OULC) 1941–47; Sheffield Liberal Party 1948–51; <i>Penrith and the Border 1959; Carlisle 1964</i>	6 Mar 97
(Judge) John Baker	OULC 1940s; National League of Young Liberals 1953–56; <i>Richmond-upon-Thames 1959, 1964</i>	8 Apr 97
Honor Balfour	Radical Action; <i>Darwen 1944, 1945</i>	19 Jan 95
The late Herbert Ballam	Poole Council 1947–50, 1952–96; Dorset County Council 1950s-1990s; Poole 1964	18 Dec 96
The late Lord (Desmond) Banks	Secretary, Liberal Candidates' Association 1947–50; <i>Harrow East 1950</i> ; Radical Reform Group; <i>St. Ives 1955; Hertfordshire South West 1959</i> ; Chairman of LPO Executive Committee 1961–63; Home Counties Federation Secretary 1960–61	6 Jun 96
Honor Barnard	Sevenoaks LA 1940s; Wokingham Council 1960–66	5 Feb 97
Peter Barrass#	Rugby Council 1958–61 ; Nuneaton LA 1961–70	Jun 97

⁹⁷³ Italicised text indicates a parliamentary contest; bold text indicates membership of a local authority; an asterisk indicates a telephone interview; # indicates an interview by questionnaire

Marjorie Barton	Huddersfield Council 1964–66	6 Aug 96
Lord (Timothy) Beaumont	OULC 1949–52; Cities of London and Westminster LA from 1961; LPO Treasurer 1963–65; LPO Publications Department 1963–64	16 Sep 96
Philip Beckerlegge*	<i>Sheffield Heeley</i> 1950; Chesterfield LA 1950s–1960s	16 Jun 97
The late Lord (Max) Beloff	Oxford, Abingdon LAs 1950s, 1960s	13 Feb 97
Bill Berry	Batley and Morley LA 1959–66	7 Mar 97
Peter Billenness	Eastbourne LA 1944–45; University of London Liberal Federation 1944–47; <i>Hendon South</i> 1959, 1964	2 Jul 96
Lionel Bivon	Liverpool Wavertree LA 1960s	28 May 96
Bill Borrow	Carlisle LA 1945–60s	17 Jan 97
Roderic Bowen	<i>MP Cardiganshire</i> 1945–66	26 Jul 95
James Boyd	Greenock Council 1961–96	15 Aug 96
Claire Brooks	Union of University Liberal Students (UULS), NLYL 1950s; Skipton LA 1956–63; <i>Skipton</i> 1959	9 Jan 97
D. Fletcher Burden#	Cambridge University Liberal Club (CULC) 1930s; <i>Stalybridge and Hyde</i> 1945, 1950; <i>Altrincham and Sale</i> 1955, 1959, 1964	Jul 97
Muriel Burton*	Manchester University Liberal Club, OULC and Manchester YLs 1950s; Oldham Council 1960s ; <i>Oldham East</i> 1964	13 Jul 97
Hilary Carr	Widow of Cyril Carr, Liverpool Council 1962–81	16 Feb 95
Lord (Pratap) Chitnis*	Marylebone LA 1958–1960s; LPO Organising Department 1960–61; Local Government Department 1961–62; Training Department 1962–64	30 Jan 97
Allen Clegg*	Halifax YLs from 1959; Halifax Council from 1963 ; <i>Bradford South</i> 1964	29 Jun 97
Peter Cocks*	Cornwall North LA and Devon and Cornwall Liberal Federation from 1945	9 Jul 97
John Cornwall*	Buckingham Council from late 1950s	16 Jun 97
Harry Cowie	LCA research department 1959–66	28 Oct 96
Sarah Curtis	OULC and UULS 1950s; New Orbits; Kensington South LA 1960s	23 Jun 97

Tom Dale	Halstead LA 1950s; London School of Economics Liberal Club 1950s; <i>Harwich 1959, 1964</i>	10 Feb 97
Walter Dalton	St. Pancras North LA 1950; Bracknell LA 1957–1970s	16 Dec 96
James Davidson*	<i>Aberdeenshire West 1964</i>	25 Jun 97
Joan Davies	Leeds YLA 1950s	12 Sep 96
Eric Depper	Birmingham University Liberal Club 1948–51; Birmingham Handsworth LA 1950s	5 Aug 96
Frank Depper	Solihull LA 1963–1970s	22 Jul 96
Mrs B. E. Dohoo*	Lewisham North LA from 1956	17 Jun 97
Roy Douglas	Streatham LA 1945; NLYL 1950s; <i>Merton and Morden 1950; Bethnal Green 1951, 1955; Gainsborough 1959, 1964</i>	29 Jul 96
Peggy Edwards	Derby LA 1957–60s; <i>Ilkeston 1964</i>	4 Feb 97
Robert Ian Elder	Edinburgh Liberal Party 1940s–1960s	9 Feb 96
The late David Evans#	Acton LA 1948–55; <i>Ealing South 1955; Southend Council 1956–59; Barking 1959; Southend East 1964</i>	Jun 97
Stan Evans	Pelsall LA from 1961; Brownhills UDC from 1963	27 Jan 97
Harold Fainlight#	Horncastle LA from 1950; Horncastle UDC from 1963	Jun 97
Freddie Fletcher*	Greenock LA 1961–1980s	19 Dec 96
Michael Fogarty	Liberal social security spokesman 1960s; <i>Devizes May 1964, 1964</i>	7 Dec 94
Elizabeth Folland	Winkleigh LA from 1958	10 Sep 96
The late Lord (John) Foot	<i>Bodmin 1945, 1950</i>	25 Jan 95
Stewart Fowlie	Edinburgh Liberal Party 1957–62	4 Dec 95

T. R. L. Fraser#	Glasgow University Liberal Club 1947–51; Glasgow and District Liberal Council 1949–51; <i>Glasgow Govan</i> 1950; Scottish League of Young Liberals 1951–54; <i>Aberdeenshire West</i> 1955; Kensington South LA 1957–60; New Orbits	Jun 97
Derek Gee	Rugby Council 1954–74	12 Feb 97
Alec Gerrard	Liverpool Wavertree LA from 1952	24 Jul 95
Simon Goldblatt	<i>Rugby</i> 1959, 1964	10 Apr 97
Peter Grafton	<i>Bromley</i> 1950; Radical Reform Group	1 Jul 96
Beth Graham	University of London Liberal Federation 1945–46; UULS 1946–47; NLYL 1947–48; <i>Faversham</i> 1950; Skipton LA 1948–50, 1951–53; Birkenhead LA 1953–55; Denbigh LA 1955; Leeds LA 1956–58; Bradford LA 1964–73	9 Jan 97
John G. Gray	Edinburgh Liberal Party from 1956	9 Feb 96
Christopher Hall	Newbury Council 1961–76	17 Dec 96
David Harcus	Kilmarnock LA 1961–64, Dunfermline LA from 1964	8 Feb 96
Peter Hawkesworth*	Guildford LA 1950–51	20 Jun 97
The late Jim Holland	<i>Bournemouth East and Christchurch</i> 1950, 1951, 1952; <i>Poole</i> 1955, 1959	19 Feb 97
Lord (Richard) Holme	New Orbits; <i>East Grinstead</i> 1964	23 Jul 97
The late Arthur Holt	<i>Bolton East</i> 1950, <i>MP Bolton West</i> 1951–64; Chief Whip 1962–63	1 Nov 94
The late William Hosking	North Cornwall LA from 1950; <i>Truro</i> 1964	10 Sep 96
James Inglis	Edinburgh Central LA 1945–54; Dunfermline Council 1963–66	6 Dec 95
Maurice Jagger*	Halifax Council 1949–78	12 Jun 97
Barbara Joyce	Bristol University Liberal Club 1940s; Bridgwater LA 1940s–1950s; <i>Bath</i> 1955; New Orbits; Putney LA 1960s	12 Sep 96
The late Timothy Joyce*	CULC; NLYL 1950s; New Orbits; <i>Aylesbury</i> 1964	13 Dec 96
The late Sir John Junor	<i>Aberdeenshire West and Kincardine</i> 1945; <i>Edinburgh North</i> 1947; <i>Dundee East</i> 1951	18 Jul 96
Lionel King	Chairman, West Midlands Liberal Federation 1962–64; <i>Kidderminster</i> 1964	11 Feb 97
Michael King	Southend Council 1961–64	28 Nov 95

Simon Knott	CULC 1950s; <i>Barons Court</i> 1959, 1964	28 Jan 97
Martin Kyrle*	Southampton LA from 1958	17 Jun 97
Alan Laurie	Shrewsbury Council 1962–65	11 Feb 97
Peter Linfoot#	Halstead LA 1947–48, 1950–55; London School of Economics Liberal Club, University of London Liberal Federation, and UULS 1952–55; Colchester LA 1955–61; Colchester Council 1957–60 ; <i>Colchester</i> 1959; Billericay LA from 1962	14 Jul 97
Ford Longman	Watford LA 1954–61	9 Jan 97
Lord (George) Mackie	<i>South Angus</i> 1959; <i>MP Caithness and Sutherland</i> 1964–66	28 Feb 96
Derek McKie	<i>Chesterfield</i> 1964	3 Feb 97
Angus Macleod	Enfield Council 1963–64	23 Oct 96
Terry Maher	Manchester Withington YLs 1956–60; <i>Accrington</i> 1964	26 Jun 97
Michael Meadowcroft	Southport LA 1958–62; LPO Local Government Officer 1962–65	15 Aug 96
David Mills	Merton and Morden YLs 1948–49; University of London Liberal Federation 1950–53; Stepney LA 1950–55; <i>Ilford North</i> 1959, 1964	23 Oct 96
Derrick Mirfin	CULC 1950–53; UULS 1952–53; Radical Reform Group; <i>Oldbury and Halesowen</i> 1955, 1959; <i>Stratford-upon-Avon</i> 1963, 1964	11 Nov 96
Barbara Moon	Patterdale LA 1950s	6 Aug 96
Frank Moore	<i>Saffron Walden</i> 1964	19 Feb 97
David Morrish	Plymouth YLs 1947–49; Exeter University Liberal Club 1949–52; Exeter LA from 1952; Exeter Council from 1961	11 Sep 96
Joan Morrish	Tavistock LA and Devon and Cornwall Young Liberal Federation 1945–53	11 Sep 96
The late Donald Newby	Eye LA 1945; Orpington LA 1956–60; <i>Eye</i> 1964	30 Sep 96
Doris Norris	Islington South LA 1918–1930s; Wimbledon LA 1945–48; Merton and Morden LA 1948–64; Bethnal Green LA 1951, 1955; Gainsborough LA 1959, 1964	8 Apr 99
Lavinia Orde*	Hexham LA from 1957	26 Jun 97
Neva Orrell	Leyland Council 1960–66	2 Nov 94

Robin Otter	Worcestershire South LA from 1962	30 Jan 97
Bob Ousby	Liverpool West Derby LA from 1947; Durham University Liberal Club 1952–55	28 May 96
Graham Oxley	Sheffield Heeley LA from 1956	4 Nov 96
Max Payne#	<i>Carlton 1964</i>	22 Jun 97
Nelia Penman#	Hemel Hempstead LA 1930s; <i>Sevenoaks 1945, 1959, 1964</i> ; Surrey East LA from 1952	21 Sep 97
David Penwarden	Ilford North LA 1945–50; OULC 1950–53; <i>West Ham North 1955; Deptford 1963; West Ham Council 1960–63</i>	19 Dec 94
Frank Phillips*	Carlisle Council 1962–65	12 Jun 97
Brian Potter*	Bradford-on-Avon YLA 1949–58; Hornchurch LA from 1958	13 Jun 97
Lilian Prowse	Agent, Devon North LA 1956–80	12 Oct 95
John Quinn	Feltham LA from 1961	10 Feb 97
Tim Ray	Surrey East LA 1945–50; Hitchin LA 1950–53; Southend East LA 1953–60; Southend West LA from 1960	6 Jul 96
Joan Rickett	Cornwall North LA from 1939	10 Sep 96
A. Ricketts	Liverpool Wavertree LA 1960s	29 May 96
David Ridley*	CULC 1952–55; <i>Saffron Walden 1959</i>	25 Jun 97
Roger Roberts	Conway LA from 1950; Bangor University Liberal Club 1954–57; NLYL 1950s	23 Sep 96
Cyril Rose	Hendon South YLA 1940s; Hertfordshire South West LA from 1958	6 Nov 96
Joyce Rose	Hertfordshire South West WLA from 1958	6 Nov 96
John Rothwell	Kearsley Council 1963–74	19 Jun 96
Jean Sargent	Southend Council 1962–89	10 Oct 95
The late Baroness (Nancy) Seear	<i>Hornchurch 1950, 1951; Truro 1955, 1959; Epping 1964</i>	20 Jan 95
Alan Share	Sunderland YLs 1950–51; OULC 1951–54; Manchester YLs 1955–59; LCA research department 1959–64; New Orbits; <i>Newcastle North 1964</i>	5 Jan 97
David Shutt	Pudsey LA from 1955	7 Mar 97
Florence Simmill*	Newport (Shropshire) LA from 1936	9 Jul 97
Adrian Slade*	Kensington South LA 1961–63, Putney LA from 1963	29 Jun 97

Sir Cyril Smith	Rochdale LA 1945–48; Agent, Stockport LA 1948–50; Rochdale Labour councillor 1950–66	24 Jan 96
Robert Smith*	Edinburgh Council 1962–77	6 Feb 97
Stan Southgate	Surrey East LA 1950; Hemel Hempstead LA 1950–1959	16 Dec 96
David Spreckley*	Huntingdonshire County Council 1960–61; <i>Yarmouth 1964</i>	5 Aug 97
Michael Steed	Isle of Thanet LA 1957–59; CULC 1959–65; UULS 1962–63	16 Jul 96
Geoffrey Smedley Stevenson	CULC 1952–56; <i>Chesterfield 1959</i> ; Ilkeston Council 1961–64; <i>Loughborough 1964</i>	25 Oct 96
Dame Muriel Stewart	Northern Counties Liberal Federation from 1920s	17 Jan 97
Frank Stockwell	Enfield West LA from 1962	20 Feb 97
Roger Straker	CULC 1955–58; UULS 1957–58; NLYL 1958–60; Rutherglen LA 1960–62; <i>Glasgow Pollok 1964</i>	20 Nov 96
Alan Thame	Wembley North LA 1946–58; Feltham LA from 1958	16 Dec 96
Celia Thomas	Winchester LA from 1964	4 Aug 97
Jeremy Thorpe	OULC 1947–50; Radical Reform Group; <i>Devon North 1955; MP Devon North 1959–79</i>	25 Oct 94
The late Chris Trethewey	Harrow East LA 1950–55; Agent, Tavistock LA 1955–68	11 Sep 96
Peter Turner	Rugby LA from 1950	4 Feb 97
Paul Tyler	OULC 1960–63; Devon County Council 1964–67	13 Dec 95
John Walker	<i>Keighley 1950; Sowerby 1951, 1955, 1959;</i> Brighouse and Spenborough LA from 1960; Chairman, Yorkshire Liberal Federation 1960s	10 Jan 97
Anthony Walton	OULC 1940s	10 Jan 96
Frank Ware	CULC 1952–55; LCA research department 1955–59; New Orbits; <i>Banbury 1964</i>	5 Feb 97
George Watson#	OULC 1948–51; Party Co-ownership Committee 1951–57; <i>Cheltenham 1959</i>	30 Jun 97
Brenda Weeks*	Wells LA from 1959	12 Jun 97

Lord (Basil) Wigoder	OULC 1939–42; <i>Bournemouth West</i> 1945, Nov 1945; <i>Westbury</i> 1959, 1964; Chairman of LPO Executive Committee 1963–65; Chairman of LPO Assembly and Organising Committees 1960s	28 Jan 97
Derek Wilbie-Chalk	Berwick upon Tweed LA from 1961	7 Jan 97
Peter Howell Williams	Shrewsbury YLA 1951–53; Wallasey LA 1953–66; Wallasey Council 1953–62 ; Chairman, North West Liberal Federation 1960s; <i>Wirral</i> 1964	29 Aug 96
Trevor Wilson	OULC 1945–48; Elland LA from 1945; West Riding County Council 1963–74 ; <i>Pudsey</i> 1964	7 Mar 97
John Windmill	Solihull Council 1962–65	12 Jul 96
Margaret Wingfield	Epsom LA 1920s; London School of Economics Liberal Club 1931–34; Putney LA from 1959; <i>Wokingham</i> 1964	11 Dec 96
Chris Foote Wood	Bury LA 1950s; King’s College, Newcastle, Liberal Club 1959–62; Newcastle Liberal Party 1959–64; Guildford LA 1964	6 Jan 97
Reg Wrighton*	Willenhall Council 1961–74	29 Jun 97
Denis Wrigley*	Stretford LA from 1947; North West Regional YLs from 1950; <i>Oldham East</i> 1959; <i>High Peak</i> 1961, 1964	4 Aug 97
Peter Wrigley	Hayes LA 1960–61; Birstall LA from 1963	7 Mar 97

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