

Liberal Party Organisation in Gloucestershire before 1914

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In the years before 1914 local organisation was of considerable importance to the success of a political party. Despite the spread of the London press into the provinces, the growing stature of national party leaders and the creation of a national party image the local focus of politics remained strong. The local press publicised the activities of local party leaders and councillors, while numerous ward and village meetings took politics to the electors through the medium of the local candidates. Every year came the vital work of compiling the election register in which parties played a significant part. In general election campaigns the numbers and enthusiasm of local workers and the efficiency with which they were organised helped to create a local party image which would affect the outcome in each constituency. Several historians have argued that local Liberal organisations were decaying in the years before 1914. Paul Thompson believes that they were in decline in London even before 1900 and that despite the electoral successes of 1906 and 1910 the decline continued. There were few paid agents, the Radical Clubs declined and there were failures in local elections. 'Liberalism was a big political tree, but were its roots strong enough?' 'For the moment the parliamentary Liberal Party was a great power, held together by success. But like the local Progressive Parties it was in danger. The recovery of the 1900s gave a deceptive illusion of strength'. He detects similar weaknesses in Birmingham, Sheffield and Liverpool.¹ In Wales, Kenneth Morgan has also noted a Liberal decline – 'a fundamental weakness of the Welsh National Liberal Council continued to be the crumbling machinery of Liberalism in the constituencies,' and he gives examples from several South Wales seats.² K.O. Fox looking more closely at South Wales agrees, arguing that the I.L.P. and the miners' organisations were growing while 'the Liberal and Lib-Lab Associations were declining into mere nominal bodies'.³ In his study of Yorkshire, M.D. Pugh mentions the collapse of Liberal organisation in seats handed over to Labour by the electoral agreement of 1903, such as Chester-le-Street and Barnard Castle (neither of course in Yorkshire), although he makes no

general comment about Liberal decline.⁴ Similarly in his study of Lancashire P.F. Clark discusses the situation only in the seats given to Labour in 1906 where he agrees that Liberal organisations were weak. He has reservations about Thompson's conclusions on the trend of London politics although his concern is not primarily with the question of the decay of local organisation. 'This may be. What is in dispute is not so much the claim that Liberalism was dying in London or Wales or anywhere else, as the assumption that it must have been'.⁵ In fact he implies that in Lancashire at least it was not. More recently, G.L. Bernstein discussing the responses of Liberals in Norwich, Leicester and Leeds to the emergence of an independent labour challenge also notes some decay of local organisation, especially in areas where council seats were won by Labour candidates.⁶

Gloucestershire, conventionally regarded as a typical Conservative shire county, in fact contained prior to 1914 an interesting variety of parliamentary seats; the five county divisions created by the 1885 Redistribution Act included West Gloucestershire or the Forest of Dean, a safe Liberal seat, North Gloucestershire or Tewkesbury, a safe Conservative seat, while the East or Cirencester, Mid or Stroud and South or Thornbury divisions each changed hands several times between 1885 and 1914. There were two parliamentary boroughs, Cheltenham which was a fairly safe Conservative seat and Gloucester which was marginal. This political variety reflected social and economic variety. Gloucester was a moderately prosperous port and industrial town as well as being the County's administrative centre. Cheltenham was a residential and spa town, no longer expanding, with a large retired and middle-class population and very few industries. The Tewkesbury division covered much of the vale of Severn, an area of dairy-farming and market-gardening, but it also included some of the suburbs of Gloucester and Cheltenham. Cirencester was another agricultural seat, covering the Cotswold uplands which had formerly been a prosperous grain-growing area but it was suffering severely from the agricultural depression of the late nineteenth century. Mid-Gloucestershire included not only the textile and engineering industries of the Stroudwater valley but also the smaller industrial district of Dursley and farming areas in the surrounding hills. The Forest of Dean was an industrial seat dominated by coal mining and Thornbury including farming, some industry and a steadily increasing area of suburban Bristol.⁷

Liberal organisations existed in both Gloucester and Cheltenham prior to the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884 and 1885, and

were soon established in the new county divisions also. The local parties were based on the democratic model established by Schnadhorst in Birmingham in the 1870s. The basic unit was the annual ward or village meeting, publicly advertised and open to all Liberal electors, to choose ward officers and committee and delegates to the constituency's General Committee or Council, often known as the Liberal Hundred (or Two Hundred, etc.) from the number of delegates. These in turn met annually to elect constituency officers and a small executive which provided the real source of power in the local party.⁸ Ancilliary to the Constituency Associations were several Liberal Clubs, Women's Liberal Associations, Young Liberal groups and Benefit Societies. The effectiveness of local party organisation might be shown in a number of ways. The minimum level of activity would be the holding of ward and constituency annual meetings and nothing else; at the other extreme an effective local party would run regular propaganda meetings, canvas, distribute literature and provide entertainment and social activities for its supporters. It would employ a full time professional agent who would organise and stimulate all these activities and who would also supervise the vital work involved with the annual registration of electors. Although individuals could claim votes for themselves or object to others' claims this was normally done by the political parties. From May to July when the register was being compiled by the local poor-law overseers, the party agent and his staff canvassed to find qualified voters and ensured they made a valid claim. When the lists were published in August the agent checked the entries and objected to those who appeared to be unqualified. In September he appeared in the revision court to support his claims and objections before the revising barrister. Naturally each party tried to get supporters onto the list and opponents off, and an individual without party backing might be opposed by both sides. Hence the efficiency of the registration work and the knowledge and effectiveness of the agent in the revision court could significantly affect election results by altering the party balance of the register. As Dr. Clark has remarked 'the franchise was very much a party affair. It was the party which put men on the register, the party which prevented them from being struck off, the party which sought them out when they moved house and the party which shepherded them to the polls'.⁹ Although in the 1890s the old practice of employing a prominent local solicitor as election agent was still the norm, by 1910 the professional agent usually took this responsibility. He would be familiar with the party's supporters and could thus recruit and organise the teams of voluntary workers, who were needed increasingly since the 1883

Corrupt Practices Act severely limited expenditure and the numbers of paid workers who could be used. The agent also organised meetings, printing and so on and had to ensure that everything done was legal. Overall he had a key role in the activities of the local party.

The focus of party activity was the parliamentary candidate or M.P. There was still a strong instinctive preference for a local man, and when a vacancy arose strong pressure was always exerted on prominent local Liberals to serve.¹⁰ Generally however they had insufficient time or money and outsider or carpet-bagger candidates were chosen. The candidate had to appear regularly for major public meetings and speaking tours as well as patronise the party's social activities and participate in the life of the local community, by attending such events as formal dinners, the county show and so on and subscribing to local clubs and good causes of every sort. The final test of the party machine and of the candidate was the result in the subsequent general election. We turn now to an examination of Liberal activity in each of the Gloucestershire seats to see how closely it approached the ideal.¹¹

In Gloucester itself there was an effective party organisation throughout the pre-war period. In the early 1890s ward meetings were regularly held and several wards had twice as many candidates as vacancies for delegates to the Two Hundred. In 1896 a new constitution increased the council to 300 and in 1901 again in response to pressure from members it was further enlarged to 700. The long serving agent James Jenkins retired in 1894, and was replaced by W.J. Arnold. The self-educated son of an agricultural labourer, he had himself worked on the land before becoming a paid lecturer in the small-holdings movement in the 1870s. From lecturing he turned to political organising and had been Liberal agent for Sleaford before coming to Gloucester. He proved to be a hard-working and effective agent, particularly successful in registration activity and in legal argument in the revision courts.¹² The agent's office and recognised party headquarters was the Gloucester Liberal Club which had occupied new premises in 1891 and reported 350 members and an income of over £1000 in 1899.¹³ The Club ran a full programme of social activities, including fortnightly smoking concerts, dances, an annual winter ball and a summer dinner always well supported. A Women's Liberal Association had about 300 members and ran an annual tea in December and a garden party at the country house of its president each summer.

The M.P. was Sir Thomas Robinson, local businessman and party leader on the city council, a former mayor and an active politician for

over 30 years, but age and ill health forced his retirement in 1895 and his successor, hampered by belated selection and the party's national difficulties, lost the seat. After some delay, perhaps caused by pre-occupation with local politics, a new candidate was chosen in December 1898. He was Russel Rea, a wealthy Liverpool shipowner with other business interests in South Wales. His commercial contacts were beneficial to Gloucester's port and industry, his views were fairly radical particularly on trades union and social policies, and he came regularly to propaganda meetings and other party functions supporting many other local causes. He regained the seat in 1900 and won again in 1906. Party activity continued at a high level, although after 1906 the lengthening parliamentary sessions and the need to maintain a government in office prevented Mr. Rea, like other Liberal M.P.s, from coming to the city so often, and there was local criticism of his absence. The party also ran into municipal problems after 1906 while in 1909 Mr. Arnold was promoted to the secretaryship of the newly formed Western Counties Liberal Federation, and his successor had not perhaps had enough time to establish himself before the election of January 1910. Mr. Rea lost the seat and would not remain candidate because he wished to return to parliament as soon as possible. His successor, H.F.B. Lynch, a wealthy eastern merchant and M.P. for Ripon 1906-10 was an extremely effective candidate, a vigorous and hard-hitting speaker far more impressive than the rather pedestrian Mr. Rea. He generated much Liberal enthusiasm but failed by a narrow margin of four votes to regain the seat in December. Despite this defeat the party organisation continued to function up till 1914. A new agent appointed in 1910 seems to have been as competent as Mr. Arnold, while there were numerous political meetings and social events run by the W.L.A., the Club, ward and constituency associations. By 1913 the W.L.A. had 700 members and a Young Liberal League founded in 1906 as a mainly 'educational rather than social organisation' maintained a membership of over 200 up to 1914. In 1912 all the local associations combined to organise a summer outing and garden party at Tibberton Court which attracted some 1500 visitors.¹⁵ Tibberton was the family home of M.P. Price who had become candidate for the city in December 1911. The family firm was a major timber importer in Gloucester docks and he had other business interests in the city. His father and grandfather had both been Liberal M.P.s and he proved to be an excellent candidate. He worked steadily, canvassing, addressing numerous meetings and patronising other local activities. He, like Mr. Rea, was particularly interested in trades union and labour matters and his increasingly radical ideas seemed likely to

retain the support of labour interests in the town.¹⁶ We may thus conclude that despite the fact that the seat had been Liberal in 1890 and was Conservative in 1914 there had been no decline of party organisation. On the contrary, party activity was still at high level, membership of the association and the W.L.A. had grown and there was a new Young Liberal branch. With a competent and well-established agent and an excellent local candidate the party organisation seems in many respects to be stronger in 1914 than it had been in the 1890s.

In Cheltenham Liberal organisation was much inferior to Gloucester's during the 1890s. Although two carpet-bagger candidates were found for the elections of 1892 and 1895, they did not stay in the constituency and there was no party agent, the registration work being handled by a voluntary committee represented by a local solicitor in the revision courts. The ward annual meetings and the constituency A.G.M. were held but there seem to have been no other political or social meetings, although some activities were run by the Liberal Club. Borough elections were fought successfully, but following the failure to contest the 1900 general election and a disastrous defeat in the 1901 municipal elections activity further decreased. It was not until 1903 when a candidate was at last found that the party began to revive. The candidate, J.E. Sears, was a London architect and leading nonconformist and he almost certainly financed the appointment of C.H. Jones as full-time agent. Mr. Jones had been in commerce and then a journalist for 15 years and had only been doing paid political work for a year but he proved to be a first-class agent. He was an efficient organiser and also a competent speaker.¹⁷ Ward organisation was revived, and in February 1905 a new constitution was adopted establishing the Cheltenham Liberal Association. With the energetic help of Mrs. Jones a W.L.A. was formed in 1904, which rapidly increased from 200 members in 1906 to 850 by 1911 and 1100 by 1913. The candidate spoke at numerous ward meetings, and major social activities were organised, such as a W.L.A. 'At Home' at the Town Hall in 1905 which attracted over 1000 guests, while a Grand Bazaar in 1907 raised £230 for party funds.¹⁸ Mr. Sears won the seat in 1906, but he did not enjoy parliamentary work and was criticised for not coming to Cheltenham often enough once he had been elected. Following his decision not to stand again the agent left, to take a more prestigious job as agent for T.J. MacNamara in Camberwell; no new agent or candidate was found until the very end of 1909 so the vital work of registration in the summer was again supervised by a voluntary committee. The new candidate, Richard Mathias, lost in January but continued as candi-

date and regained the seat in December. The triumph was short lived for the Conservatives lodged a petition and Mr. Mathias was unseated for corrupt and illegal practices. The court made it clear that it was not Mr. Mathias but his agent Mr. Kessell who was at fault. This was his first post as chief agent, he had been in full-time political work for only 18 months and had been in Cheltenham only since November. Mr. Kessell was ignorant of election law, failed to keep control of party workers, exceeded the legal maximum expenditure and falsified the accounts. Some traditional local practices previously unquestioned were actually illegal, so Mr. Mathias lost his seat.¹⁹ The case shows the crucial importance of having a thoroughly competent agent. Moreover the Liberals lost the subsequent bye-election by only four votes and the register used had been compiled in the summer of 1910 when there had been no Liberal agent to maximise the number of Liberals on the register and challenge Conservative claims, hence the lack of an agent in 1910 may well explain the loss of the bye-election. Despite his defeat, Mr. Mathias continued to appear regularly in Cheltenham although he became candidate for Tewkesbury in December. By 1913 it was clear that he would not be able to stand for Cheltenham so a new candidate was found, Mr. Rhys Williams a barrister and landowner in South Wales whose social contacts proved something of an asset.²⁰ Mr. F. Alcott became agent in the summer of 1911 and proved to be 'an extremely able man resourceful, crisp and incisive'.²¹ Under his guidance the party organisation made steady progress. Membership of the constituency association and of the W.L.A. seems to have increased, and the Young Liberal League formed in 1909 of which Mrs. Alcott became secretary had 600 members in 1911.²² There were many propaganda meetings and successful social events all suggesting that Liberal party organisation in Cheltenham had greatly improved by 1914.

In Stroud the Liberal party had been disastrously affected by the Home Rule split which caused the defection of the sitting M.P. and much of the local party leadership and the Conservative triumphed at the 1886 general election. By 1890 there were signs of a recovery, led by Alfred Apperly, a prominent local businessman, E.J.C. Morton, M.P. for Plymouth, whose family lived in the constituency and A.B. Winterbotham, Dursley mill-owner and M.P. for Cirencester, but organisation was weak and it was not until April 1892 that a candidate was found. He was David Brymnor Jones, son of a Welsh Congregational minister, a barrister and judge of the Gloucester County Court from which he resigned to become candidate. He campaigned virtually non-stop from April until the election in July and won the

seat. The weakness of the local organisation is suggested by the fact that he had to rely on what the Conservatives ridiculed as a 'travelling platform' of chairman and supporting speakers for his meetings, because there were no local supporters in many of the villages, and efforts were made to rebuild the party after the election. A Women's Liberal Association formed in June began to establish local branches, a Stroud Liberal Club was founded in December and had 500 members by the end of 1893. A series of ward meetings was held culminating in the reformation of the constituency Liberal Association in May, 1894.²³ But problems continued. Instead of a professional agent the party relied until 1894 on the old practice of using a prominent local solicitor for the registration work, and organisation was the responsibility of the honorary secretary, a local accountant. Mr. Brymnor Jones proved to be something of an absentee member more interested in Welsh affairs than Stroud, and in November 1894 he announced he would not stand again, shortly afterwards becoming candidate for Swansea. Efforts to find a replacement did not succeed until June 1895 just three weeks before the general election and the Conservatives regained the seat.

However, the new Liberal candidate, C.P. (Charlie) Allen, came to live in the constituency and the party organisation steadily improved. In September G.E. Harrison was appointed agent. He like Mr. Arnold came from humble origins and had worked on the land and in coal mines before taking up political work in the 1880s. Coincidentally he too had been agent in Sleaford, and had been agent in Cirencester before coming to Stroud. He achieved a high reputation not only as an organiser but also as a fluent and incisive public speaker.²⁴ The constituency Liberal Association and the W.L.A. flourished, providing a regular programme of social and political events and there were several effective district associations. The Stroud Liberal Club also ran regular smoking concerts, and there was another Liberal Club at Wotton-under-Edge in the south of the division. The parliamentary seat was regained in 1900 and held in 1906 and 1910, although some problems had appeared by 1914. Charlie Allen, who had won considerable personal popularity, suffered from ill health after 1910 and also found it difficult to meet the demands both of parliament and of the local Liberals. In 1913 he announced that he would not stand again, and Mr. Harrison who was also ill retired in February, 1914. Late in 1913 the Stroud Liberal Club closed and Liberal morale was further decreased by problems over the selection of a new candidate, ironically not because none could be found but because there were two strong local contenders, and eventually a compromise candidate was chosen from outside the

constituency.²⁵ However in the short period between his selection and the war the new candidate threw himself into a strenuous programme of meetings while F.W. King the new agent set about familiarising himself with the local organisation.²⁶ A branch of the Young Liberals established in 1910 continued to meet regularly, with a weekly programme of discussions on political topics as well as whist drives and dances, while the W.L.A. and the constituency party also remained active. It seems therefore that while the party was possibly not quite as well placed in 1914 as it had been in 1900 the organisation was still operating effectively and was certainly in better shape than it had been in the early 1890s.

The Cirencester division was won for the Liberals in 1885 by the radical A.B. Winterbotham and since he voted against the Home Rule bill his re-election in 1886 was not opposed by the Conservatives. To their great annoyance however he soon returned to the Gladstonian party, championing the cause of agricultural labourers' unions and the small-holdings movement. A Liberal Two Hundred had been established in 1884, with district associations in the small towns of Moreton, Fairford and Cirencester; instead of a professional agent, Mr. Winterbotham used a number of part-time sub-agents to oversee the registration and organise local activities.²⁷ Regular propaganda meetings and occasional social events were held, but his majority fell in the 1892 election and he died shortly afterwards. The party's national secretary Francis Schnadhorst suggested to Henry Broadhurst who had lost his seat as Lib-Lab M.P. for Nottingham at the general election that he should stand, but nothing came of the idea, and the local party chose instead H.L.W. (Harry) Lawson, son of the owner of the *Daily Telegraph*. The radical *Cheltenham Free Press* presented him as a worthy successor to Mr. Winterbotham, but the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* was perhaps nearer the mark when it suggested he had been 'sent down by party headquarters because he is a man of some means who wants a seat'.²⁸ He lost the ensuing bye-election by three votes, petitioned and secured the elimination of the majority, so a further bye-election was held which he won. G.E. Harrison, who had come to help at the bye-election, was retained as full time agent and he began to strengthen the organisation. The local party was revived, a Liberal Working Men's Club was founded in Cirencester in 1893 and a W.L.A. in 1894, Mr. Lawson attended numerous village meetings and there were several major rallies but despite these efforts the Conservatives won the seat in 1895. Mr. Lawson would not remain the candidate, although he did promise to support the registration work in 1896, so an agent was employed during that summer. He stayed until the end of 1898, and

another was appointed in June 1899. A modest level of political and social activity continued in Cirencester itself but no candidate could be found in 1900, the Cirencester Liberal Club closed, and Liberal activity virtually ceased until the appointment of F.J. Arnold as agent in the summer of 1902. The following year Mr. R.W. Essex became candidate and the Liberal revival culminated in victory at the general election of 1906. Thereafter the Two Hundred met regularly, district associations were formed in Moreton, Stow, Tetbury, Chipping Camden and Cirencester. A W.L.A. formed in Cirencester in 1908 had 500 members by May 1909. A monthly magazine was published from 1908 and a new headquarters building acquired in 1909 became the base for a Liberal Social Club. Mr. F.T. Horne who had become agent in 1906 was a prominent local nonconformist, a farmer and county councillor with good organising ability and widespread family connections.²⁹ He was very popular with the local party, but despite his work and all the party activity Mr. Essex lost the seat in January 1910. He would not stand again, and although a candidate was found for the December election, G.H. Beyfuss, he too was defeated. However these set backs did not lead to decay of the party organisation. Mr. Horne had insisted despite the pleas of the party on resigning in the summer of 1910, but he was replaced and although the new agent left a year later the vacancy was immediately filled by A.T. Dillon, an experienced professional who had previously been agent in Worcestershire and in Bristol. Mr. Essex who was elected M.P. for Stafford in 1910 kept his house in Bourton-on-the-Water, and continued to visit the constituency as did Mr. Beyfuss, who however would not accept the candidacy. Meetings and social events were held regularly, the circulation of the monthly magazine increased and in Cirencester the W.L.A. and the Liberal Club continued. Finally, in the summer of 1913, C.W. Winterbotham was adopted as candidate. He was the son of J.B. Winterbotham, a Cheltenham solicitor, a senior figure in local Liberalism and a cousin of A.B. Winterbotham; born in Cheltenham in 1887 and educated at Cheltenham College and Oxford he had been called to the bar in 1911. He inherited his father's considerable ability as a public speaker and quickly set about getting himself known in the division, with a heavy programme of meetings and social events in the following winter.³⁰ It thus seems that by 1914 the local party was in good shape and though not as in the early 90s holding the seat it had a candidate who seemed likely to be as good as A.B. Winterbotham, an experienced agent and a more active local organisation.

In Tewkesbury, a safe Conservative seat, the Liberal organisation was very weak. There was no candidate for the 1886 election and

although a Two Hundred met in 1892 and the election was fought, it seems not to have met again until 1895 when it decided not to contest the election in June. Efforts by the Gloucester Liberal agent and the Midland Liberal Federation stimulated its revival in 1896 and it managed to meet annually thereafter but there was no Liberal activity anywhere in the division apart from the small borough of Tewkesbury itself, where a district Liberal association ran occasional smoking concerts and socials and contested the borough council elections. Some work in the registration of electors was done by W.J. Arnold, and in 1898 his son F.J. Arnold was employed for a while, but the 1900 election was not contested. It was not until the adoption of R.A. Lister, owner of a Dursley agricultural-engineering business, in 1903 that Liberal activity increased, and this was confined largely to his own public meetings. W. Gavazzi King³¹ became agent in 1903 and district associations were formed in Winchcombe and Cheltenham, while a W.L.A. was set up in Tewkesbury. At the 1906 election Mr. Lister was defeated. Mr. King left and Liberal activity came to an end for three years. Then in the summer of 1909 John Wood was appointed agent. A Methodist lay-preacher and son of a Methodist minister he came from Leigh in Lancashire where he had run the Liberal party for 15 years. He was tall with a commanding presence and a fine speaking style, had been a county councillor for 12 years and a J.P.³² He worked hard at registration, was elected to Gloucester City Council in 1910, published a *Liberal Monthly* and arranged a number of public meetings. The two elections of 1910 were both fought unsuccessfully by Mr. Lister, and in 1911 Mr. Mathias became the candidate. He was already well known in the area as a result of his activities in Cheltenham and continued to visit the constituency regularly, addressing a series of village meetings in the winter of 1913-14 and again in the summer of 1914. At the annual meetings of the divisional association record income was reported each year from 1911, and the Tewkesbury district association and W.L.A. continued to function.³³ In 1913 plans were reported for a thorough overhaul of organisation ready for the next election. Clearly then in 1914 the Liberal party in the division was better placed than it had been in the 1890s with good leadership and at least some organisation functioning regularly.

We turn finally to the safe Liberal seat of West Gloucestershire where the sitting M.P. from 1892 to his death in 1911 was Sir Charles Dilke. As an acknowledged national expert on registration law he took a personal interest in the annual registration of electors, attended annual ward meetings every year until 1900, and the constituency annual meeting in the summer. The local organisation

seems to have been thorough and efficient and was supported by a number of W.L.A.s, while in 1911 Young Liberal branches were set up in each ward. The agent, G. Döcwra, combined the agency with others, but on his death in 1904 a full-time local agent was appointed and he served until 1914. No details of the finances or membership of the party seems to have survived but attendance at meetings and the convincing majorities secured by Sir Charles, and by his successor at the 1911 bye-election, suggest that the Liberal organisation was in reasonable shape.³⁴

Although the main aim of the Liberal Associations was to win parliamentary elections they were also deeply involved in local government, especially in the three boroughs where council elections occurred annually in November. In Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury the Liberal party leaders were almost without exception prominent on the borough councils, elections were contested on party lines and councillors played an important or even vital role in the ward organisation.³⁵ Of course national issues were not necessarily relevant in the local context while local issues did not always separate people on the same lines as national political divisions. For example, in Cheltenham although councillors were elected as Liberals or Conservatives supported by party workers in the wards and endorsed by the party associations, in the council chamber they usually divided into a progressive party which favoured expanding municipal activities and improving the town to attract more visitors, a policy particularly identified in the 1890s with the Conservative majority group leader Dr. Ward-Humphreys. The more cautious councillors anxious about rising rates were mostly Liberals, but the senior Liberal was Alderman George Norman who chaired the Electric Light Committee and strongly supported the extension of electric lighting and the expansion of other municipal enterprises. The Liberals who had won control when the borough was created in 1877 had been replaced by the Conservatives in 1882. In the 1890s they slowly improved their position and in 1897 benefiting from a number of local and national factors and a vigorous ratepayers' protest movement against the alleged extravagance of Conservative progressive policies they regained control. In practice however the Liberals continued the progressive policies, their choice for mayor being Alderman Norman, and in 1901 a further ratepayers' revolt restored the Conservatives to power, a position which they retained up to 1914. During the 1890s party feelings had been at times quite bitter but after 1900 hostility gradually diminished. An agreement to share the aldermancies had been reached in 1900 and in 1903 the Conservative majority agreed to elect a Liberal mayor. Despite some

aggression from a number of newer Conservatives after 1906, particularly in the north ward, cooperation between the party leaderships on the council continued and the number of contested elections diminished (see table 1). This was partly because of agreements between the parties but also because the Liberals had increasing difficulty in finding candidates. In 1905 when Conservative morale was at an all-time low the Liberals fought all six seats, but thereafter they never fought more than three (except in 1908 when the five victors of 1905 defended their seats) while the Conservatives always had five or six candidates. From 1910 to 1913 there were no Liberal candidates at all in two wards and two others were fought only once. Yet a good Liberal candidate could do well if he persisted. In 1912 T.W. Smith fought the south ward, last won by a Liberal in 1896 and not contested since 1905. Although defeated in November, he was triumphantly returned at a bye-election three weeks later. But even this success was not followed up for the ward was again uncontested in 1913 and at another bye-election in 1914. Some Liberals were concerned at the situation. The *Cheltenham Chronicle*, at the time Liberal, felt that the aldermanic pact was 'prejudicial to local Liberalism as a fighting force' because it made Liberals on the Council 'too prone to try to save their bacon by compromises'. Failure to fight local elections caused decay of ward organisation. But the main problem was that 'well-to-do Liberals are scarce' and there were few who could afford the £20 or £30 which a local election campaign would cost.³⁶ It is possible that the party had funds to assist poorer candidates³⁷ but there were clearly not enough to overcome the problem, and lack of candidates remained a major cause for concern up to 1914.

In Gloucester, municipal politics were considerably more embittered than in Cheltenham, with intense personal hostility at times and many contested elections. During the 1890s the parties were very evenly balanced and control of the aldermanies was often crucial to control of the council. A narrow Liberal majority disappeared in 1894, was restored in 1896 and ended again thanks to personal feuds and defections in 1898. The latter changes arose out of the 1896 smallpox epidemic which was in effect exploited by the Liberals and which further increased hostility. In 1900 the whole council was elected following a boundary extension and each party won 15 seats. However the retiring Conservative mayor presided at the start of the first meeting of the new council and used his vote to elect a Conservative successor. He in turn used a casting vote to secure all ten aldermanies for the Conservatives who thus took control. The Liberals then petitioned against the election of one

Conservative councillor who was unseated and the court also ruled that since his vote in the aldermanic election was invalid the Liberal nominees should have been elected and the Liberals consequently won control. They won more seats up to 1903 but thereafter the Conservatives slowly recovered and regained a majority in 1908. Throughout this period the intense party rivalry had been associated with differences over local as well as national policies and considerable personal abuse, but from 1908 relations slowly improved. The Conservatives remained in control but the parties eventually cooperated in the choice of aldermen, and there were talks in 1913 about agreement on the mayoralty. At the same time the Liberals began to have difficulty in finding candidates. In 1910, 1911, and 1913 there were only four for the ten wards, and in 1912 they did little better with five candidates and support for independents in three other wards. The situation was deplored by the *Liberal Gloucester Journal*, which in 1912 urged a long-term campaign to regain control of the council at the 1915 aldermanic elections, and found the failure to attack any Conservative seats in 1913 'very disappointing'. Speaking after the count that year, the Liberal group leader advocated an all-round fight next time, and the agent promised to find ten candidates, though it is impossible to say whether he would have succeeded.³⁸ The Gloucester Liberal party did have a fund subscribed by supporters to assist less-wealthy council candidates, which might have assisted the search but unfortunately no details of how much was available or how it was raised and spent have survived.³⁹ Another possibility was formal cooperation with the local labour movement which had promoted two council candidates in 1912 and 1913 with unofficial Liberal support, although labour candidates appeared to poll less well than Liberals even when assisted by the Liberal organisation. If the shortage of candidates could be overcome, by these or other means, the votes achieved in the wards which were fought in 1912 and 1913 show that the Liberal party could certainly remain an effective force in Gloucester municipal affairs.

In the small borough of Tewkesbury elections were vigorously fought by the parties with election meetings, leaflets, intensive canvassing and polling-day organisation despite the fact that national policies were almost completely irrelevant, and few local issues arose to distinguish the parties, each of which appeared to stand for progress with efficiency and economy while accusing its opponents of irresponsibility and extravagance. The Conservatives had a majority from 1892 to 1904 and regained control after four years of Liberal rule in 1908, but the significance of these changes is difficult to assess.

The Liberal victories of 1904 and 1905 were probably related to national factors, but normally the personalities of individual candidates seem to have been more significant. The parties came to an agreement after 1910 to re-elect all the retiring councillors, so there were no further contests, and in 1913 the Conservative majority agreed to re-elect the remaining Liberal alderman. However there had been a similar arrangement to avoid contests from 1901 to 1903, so it did not necessarily imply a permanent end to party activity or a decline of Liberal strength.

While the Liberal party was thus a significant force on all three borough councils in Gloucestershire, the county council was dominated by the Conservatives from 1889 to 1914, the chairman for most of the period being Sir John Dorington of Lypiatt Park near Stroud, a leading Stroud Conservative and M.P. for Tewkesbury from 1885 to 1905. County council elections occurred every three years and were very rarely contested.⁴⁰ The normal practice was the unopposed return of a prominent local man such as the leading land-owner, businessman or farmer. A contest might occur on the retirement of a sitting member, but even then it was as likely to be a personal as a political fight. Consequently there was significant Liberal representation only in the Forest of Dean dominated by the miners, and in Cheltenham where the six seats were shared by party agreement from 1895 onward. Elsewhere several Liberal businessmen such as R.A. Lister in Dursley, W. Jackson in Tewkesbury and W.G. Clissold in Nailsworth were chosen, while J.H. Alpass a socialist and later Labour M.P. sat for Berkeley from 1907, but most councillors were Conservative. In the council itself controversy was rare and when it did arise was not on party lines. Administrative responsibility was shared; for example Mr. Lister was chairman of the small-holdings committee, and members often saw themselves as spokesman for their area rather than their party.

The only serious disturbance to this calm arose at the election of 1904. The Education Act of 1902 had aroused furious opposition from the Liberals and deep nonconformist resentment, and as early as September 1902 the county Liberal committee chaired by Sir Charles Dilke resolved to fight every county council seat in 1904. In practice this proved an over-ambitious target. The Cheltenham Liberals refused to break their local agreement, while in other places local Liberals would not oppose sitting Conservatives whose views on education were progressive, but Liberal and nonconformist enthusiasm eventually produced some 34 candidates for the 57 seats. 11 Liberals were unopposed and in 21 contests they gained six seats to make a total of 24, the peak of Liberal performance before 1914.

Thereafter interest in county elections quickly declined, and the political effort of 1904 was not repeated.⁴¹

A similar picture of political quiescence was generally to be found in many other local authorities in the county such as boards of guardians, school boards, urban and rural district and parish councils. Party politics and contested elections were rare. When the district and parish councils were set up in 1894, there was some party involvement. Several parish council elections were fought on party lines notably in the more urbanised parts of the Stroud division,⁴² but by 1913 the last election before the war, party feeling had much diminished. The district councils had annual elections until 1898 and there were several political fights. The Cirencester Conservatives captured 11 of the 12 U.D.C. seats in 1894, by what the Liberals regarded as sharp practice, but thereafter they made concessions and the Liberals eventually held four or five seats. The Stroud U.D.C. was won by the Conservatives who took 11 of the 18 seats in 1894 and they retained a majority until 1914. The elections, every three years after 1898, were fought by the parties until 1904, C.P. Allen the Liberal parliamentary candidate being a member from 1898 to 1904. However some Liberals disliked the political involvement, and after the 1904 elections the *Stroud Journal* whose editor William Thompson was a leading member of the local party commented that the Liberal party ticket had not operated effectively, adding that 'the more intelligent portion of the community is opposed to mixing up politics with these local contests',⁴³ and thereafter the Liberals who stood for the council fought as individuals without party backing. Perhaps as a result of this policy the number of Liberal candidates which had always been slightly less than the Conservatives' declined from 12 in 1904 to only 4 in 1913 while the Conservatives continued to fight as a team supported by the local party machine and in 1913 produced for the first time since 1894 a full slate of 18 candidates. The *Stroud Journal* which was staunchly radical in national politics continued to support the non-political line and deplored Conservative insistence on dragging politics into local elections but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Liberal policy was mistaken. Fighting local elections gave the party organisation experience and strengthened the loyalty and enthusiasm of party workers. Allowing the Conservatives unchallenged domination of local politics was hardly likely to enhance the credibility of the Liberal party in Stroud.

In most of Gloucestershire local government remained essentially non-party and it seems unlikely that the special circumstances of 1904 which temporarily politicised county council elections would be

repeated. This does not necessarily imply Liberal decline, for the situation had been the same throughout the nineteenth century; the Conservative party's predominance among the wealthy, leisured and landowning classes who could afford the time and the money to serve in local government continued to give it a majority. The dramatic decline of Liberal activity in Stroud U.D.C. and the smaller decline in Gloucester and Cheltenham, summarised in table (1) also probably reflects the shortage of rich Liberals. In Cheltenham from about 1900, and in Gloucester from about 1910, the number of Liberal candidates and Liberal victories declined, so that from 1910 to 1914 Liberals were contesting only about half the vacancies while the Conservatives fought nearly all. Liberals could still win – three of the six Cheltenham wards and seven of the ten in Gloucester returned a Liberal at least once from 1910 to 1914 – but wards were not fought regularly. The position was better in Tewkesbury where the parties were still evenly balanced; and with about one third of the councillors in Cheltenham and Gloucester the Liberals were still a significant force, but they had lost ground since the 1890s. Some losses were due to personal factors and to national trends but these had operated equally in the 1890s and the new problem was the lack of Liberals with time and money to be candidates. It is impossible to say whether the problem would be overcome. Some financial support was apparently available from party funds, and if the finances of the local parties could be strengthened it would presumably be possible to continue and indeed to increase support.

Both the party organisation' discussed above and local-election activity were dependent on finance, and parliamentary elections were even more expensive. The Home Rule split of 1886 took many wealthy Liberals into the Conservative camp, continuing the general trend of the later nineteenth century, and although Liberals from Gladstone downwards proudly claimed to represent the masses against the classes the party was increasingly dependent on a small number of rich supporters for the substantial sums of money needed. To run the local party a good agent would expect at least £150 a year, while rent and other office expenses might cost £100. The agent would need additional help for registration, say £50, to which must be added hire of halls for meetings, purchase or printing of propaganda material and payments for outside speakers. Altogether some £400 would be needed. Then local election campaigns cost between £20 and £30, while a general election required some £700 in a borough and £1200 in a county division.⁴⁴ On top of all this direct political expenditure a candidate or M.P. was constantly badgered for subscriptions and donations to every local club and good cause.

The disappearance of the archives of all the local Liberal parties and the personal papers of almost all candidates and M.P.s makes it impossible to provide a detailed account of local Liberal finances. A few printed reports of the Gloucester party, the official returns of election expenses and occasional references to finance in the press reports of meetings do provide some information to illustrate problems and achievements. In 1894, the Baron de Ferrières, who had been Liberal M.P. for Cheltenham from 1880 to 1885, put his own expenditure on politics at £1000 a year and he thought that his Conservative successor, J.T. Agg Gardner, had spent £1500 a year. On top of this each election cost £1000 and there had been two election petitions which cost £2000. The Baron felt that such a level of expenditure was undesirable and suggested that a reasonable sum for donations and subscriptions was £500 a year. The local party supporters should pay for registration which could be done for £150. Mr. Agg Gardner did not contradict the Baron's estimates of his expenses saying that he regarded such expenditure as 'just, legitimate and proper'.⁴⁵ Sir John Dorington whose Tewkesbury seat was solidly Conservative spent considerably less, only £50 a year on political donations, mostly of five shillings each to village flower-shows, cricket clubs and so on, and £150 to help finance registration. He did make other donations such as to the Gloucester Infirmary and the Agricultural Society but did not count them as political, since he would continue them whether or not he were M.P. In addition he had spent not more than £1,250 on his election campaign. His successor, M.H. Hicks-Beach agreed with the local party to give £200 a year for registration if the party guaranteed a further £300 and to pay £1000 towards the election expenses if local supporters found the rest. He also no doubt spent considerable sums on donations and subscriptions.⁴⁶

While these three examples come from the Conservative side, Liberal requirements were broadly similar, though smaller sums of money could produce some effect. For example, in 1898 the Tewkesbury Divisional Liberal Association was stimulated by a conditional offer of £50 from Sir Charles Dilke to raise a further £50 and was consequently able to employ F.J. Arnold on registration work thereafter. In 1901 and 1902 the chief whip paid Tewkesbury £50 from central party funds, and by 1903 Dilke had increased his contribution to £100 and it seems likely that local supporters matched these sums. The chief whip also provided £500 for general election expenses in 1906 the rest being paid presumably by the candidate, R.A. Lister, perhaps helped by other local Liberals. The central fund also gave £650 for R.W. Essex in Cirencester and £400

for J.E. Sears in Cheltenham, in each case roughly half the cost of their election, but does not seem to have helped the sitting Liberal M.P.s in Stroud, Gloucester or the Forest of Dean. Indeed Russell Rea and Sir Charles Dilke subscribed to the party's national general election fund as well as (presumably) paying for their local campaigns.⁴⁷

The Tewkesbury Liberals had only £100 a year at the turn of the century, but the Cheltenham party had even less. Morale was low because of the failure to fight the 1900 general election and municipal election set-backs, and the treasurer reported income falling from £81 in 1900 to only £51 in 1902. Expenditure was cut by relying entirely on unpaid help for registration. 'Several' subscribers who seem to have contributed about £20 had left in 1901, and in 1902 two 5 guineas subscriptions were lost. Even if these were larger than the average, they suggest that there can hardly have been more than 100 subscribers altogether and probably far fewer. This was obviously unsatisfactory, and the honorary secretary argued at the 1903 A.G.M. that 'if the Liberal Hundred was to become a really effective organisation its members should be required to subscribe something however small towards party expenses',⁴⁸ and by 1914 some progress was made in this direction. Although the new constitution of 1904 did not require members to subscribe it encouraged them to do so, and in 1912 the treasurer reported the most favourable balance sheet he had presented and an increase in membership of 201. The chairman asked the A.G.M. for even greater support, saying that the association needed at least £300 a year to support the agent and organisation which perhaps implies that income was less than that, but it was clearly better than in 1900.⁴⁹ The agent's contract was renewed in 1912 and he remained in post until the war so income must have been adequate. In addition to the association, the W.L.A. and Young Liberals also raised money. Their standard subscription was usually 1s., a figure supported by the fact that income from W.L.A. membership which rose from 850 to 1200 during 1911-12 totalled £43. 18. 6d. There were 600 Young Liberals in 1911 but no figures for income have survived. Since W.L.A. membership remained at over 1100 it seems likely that its income in 1913 was as much as the whole party had raised in 1902.⁵⁰

What is not revealed by these figures is the extent to which the party depended on its candidate and a few wealthy supporters. The evidence in the trial of the 1911 election petition shows that Mr. Mathias had financed the election campaign in December. He had engaged the agent, Mr. Kessell at £12:10s a month and Mr. Kessell wrote to him whenever he needed money. Between November 23

and January 25 Mr. Mathias had paid him £750 of which £558 had been spent on the election and the rest on 'subscriptions to different objects'. The candidate also paid just over £100 for the returning officer's expenses, £75 personal expenses, and a further £50 which was returned by the returning officer from the deposit of £150 was also spent.⁵¹ This suggests a total of just under £1000 and Mr. Mathias had already fought and presumably paid for the previous election in January. There followed the election petition which may well have cost over £1000 and the bye-election in May probably another £1000, a total of some £4000. It is possible that some local Liberals contributed and it is likely that the central party financed the petition and possibly contributed to election expenses as for Mr. Sears in 1906. Even so it is clear that Mr. Mathias must have spent a great deal of money on being candidate for Cheltenham. Although he was not immediately re-adopted he continued to visit the town regularly and there were hopes that he might be able to stand again; thus he probably subscribed to local party funds at least until 1913 when a new candidate was adopted, but it is not possible to say how much of the party's improved financial situation resulted from Mr. Mathias' generosity.

In Gloucester a little more evidence survives for 1909 and 1910. A new treasurer was appointed in May 1909 and he found a deficit of nearly £300 on the previous year's working. Although a special appeal cleared this debt the deficit for 1909 was still over £100. Subscriptions for the year totalled nearly £300, of which the M.P., Russell Rea, gave £200 and 15 others just over £50. There were 160 subscribers altogether while the special appeal raised £273. 9. 0 from 21 people including £100 from Mr. Rea. The following year 176 people contributed a total of £391. 5s. of which the new candidate, H.F.B. Lynch, gave £150 and a further £100 came from 13 other individuals. This gave an excess of income over expenditure and the overdraft was reduced by £50 to just over £50, while the following year the treasurer reported a record income and 57 more subscribers (which gives a total of 233) but he said he would not be content until every member of the Eight Hundred subscribed, so he still had a long way to go! No details of Gloucester W.L.A. finances survive; its membership of 700 in 1913 implies an income of £35 while the Young Liberal League had a membership of well over 200 and an annual income of just under £30 from 1911 to 1913.⁵² Overall, the increasing number of subscribers, the growth of the W.L.A., and the existence of the Young Liberals all suggest that the Gloucester Liberal Association was succeeding in increasing its income in the years just before the war.

Elsewhere in the county details of Liberal finances are even scarcer. No doubt financial problems closed the Stroud Liberal Club in 1913 but no information about the Stroud party's funds appeared beyond the treasurer's statements that accounts were satisfactory. Here, as in the Forest of Dean where the treasurer reported a satisfactory balance of over £20 in 1914, the maintenance of an agent and office and the continuation of registration work show that money was available, but its source is unknown. In Cirencester the divisional association had an income of £142. 6. 3 in 1910/11 and spent only £80; clearly the candidates must have paid for the 1910 election campaigns and at least part of the agent's salary.⁵³ The 1911 A.G.M. agreed that the situation was unsatisfactory and voted that subscriptions should be put on 'a more democratic basis'. Finances were reorganised and since annual reports were satisfactory up to 1914 some progress was presumably made. In Tewkesbury the Liberal treasurer was more positive. He reported record income in 1911, 1912 and 1913 and was particularly gratified by the increasing number of small subscriptions, while in 1913 the situation was so good that the agent was given a 'large' salary increase.⁵⁴ In addition to subscriptions occasional special efforts were made to raise funds, such as the Cheltenham Liberal bazaar which raised £230 in 1907 and the Stroud historical pageant which made a profit of £285. 1. 11d in 1911. At a less grandiose level the Cirencester Liberals planned a rummage sale in March 1911, but there does not seem to have been a consistent policy to raise funds by trading or social activities in any of the local associations before 1914.

Despite the lack of detail the picture which emerges of Liberal finances in Gloucestershire suggests that the candidates and a few better off supporters provided a large proportion of the income. However some progress had been made in raising larger sums locally and also in increasing the number of small subscriptions. This was no easy task when there was no tradition of political giving, but the encouragement of the local Liberal press and the pleas of party treasurers seem to have led to somewhat more democratic financing of Liberal politics by 1914.

The final test for a political party would be a general election campaign, but the coming of war in 1914 caused the postponement of the general election which should have been held before December 1915, so the final test was not faced until the political situation had been completely changed. The results of the last pre-war elections in 1910, although worse than in the landslide Liberal victory of 1906, were similar to those of 1892 which nationally saw a moderate Liberal recovery from the disaster of 1886 (see table 2). Compared with 1892

the Liberal candidate in 1910 polled over 5 per cent less in Cirencester, about 1 per cent less in Gloucester, about the same in Stroud, about 1 per cent more in Tewkesbury and the Forest of Dean, and 5 per cent more in Cheltenham, winning four of the six seats in 1892 and three in 1910. Except in the Forest majorities were small, so that changes in the quality of organisation or candidate after 1910 could have had a significant impact on future elections and local improvements could have justified cautious Liberal optimism about the outcome of an election in 1915. Liberals believed that their chances would be further improved by the abolition of plural voting which it was expected would be enacted under the machinery of the Parliament Act prior to the election.⁵⁵ Of course national factors would also have exerted an influence and might have reduced or eliminated local advantages but there was little local evidence to suggest that the party was heading for electoral disaster in 1915.

This article has attempted to assess the strength of Gloucestershire Liberalism before 1914 by examining the party organisation, party finances and activity in local elections. A cause for concern was the lack of men willing to stand in local elections, although it does seem that when the electors had the chance they were as willing to vote for Liberal candidates as they had been in the 1890s. The same is true of parliamentary elections where the party's performance in December 1910 was broadly similar to what it achieved in the 1890s. In organisation there seems to have been some improvement by 1914. The various local associations had higher membership and income while propaganda meetings and social activities were more numerous. With full-time professional agents in all constituencies registration work was regularly done and organisation maintained or improved. In Gloucester and Cirencester the party had excellent local parliamentary candidates; in Tewkesbury Sir Richard Mathias, knighted in the 1913 New Years Honours, was hard-working and well-established. The Cheltenham candidate was an outsider who had been selected only recently as was C.P. Allen's successor in Stroud, but both were undertaking intensive campaigns in their constituencies during 1914. The Forest of Dean appeared to be a completely safe Liberal seat even though the new M.P. had less easy relations with the miners who dominated the electorate than Sir Charles Dilke had done. Overall it seems fair to conclude that Gloucestershire Liberalism was in reasonable health in 1914 and that the causes of its collapse must be sought in the years after the outbreak of war rather than before.

Table 1 Municipal election results 1891–1914.

Cheltenham M.B.C.	Vacancies		Candidates ¹		Councillors elected.	
			Lib.	Con.	Lib.	Con.
1891–5 ²	36	22		29	12	23
1896–1900	30	23		20	18	11
1901–05	30	19		21	12	18
1906–10	30	13		26	10	20
1911–13	18	8		15	4	14
(1911–13 expressed as a proportion of 30)	30	13½		25	6⅔	23½
Gloucester C.B.C						
1891–5	45	34		37	17	27
1896–9	36	27(+2)		32	16(+1)	16
1900 ³	30	24(+1)		29	15	15
1901–05	50	40(+4)		44	28(+1)	21
1906–10	50	42		49	18	32
1911–13	30	15(+3)		27	12	18
(1911/13 expressed as a proportion of 50)	50	26(+4)		45	20	30)
Tewkesbury M.B.C. ⁴						
1891–5	20	18		18	9	11
1896–1900	20	18		18	11	9
1901–05	20	14		14	13	7
1906–10	20	20		20	7	13
1911–13	12	5		7	5	7
(1911–13 expressed as a proportion of 20)	20	8½		11⅔	8½	11⅔
Stoud U.D.C. ⁵						
1894	18	12		18	7	11
1898	18	12		14	8	10
1901	18	10		9	8	9
1904	18	12		13	7	10
1907	18	9 ⁶		13	5	11
1910	18	9		16	4	13
1913	18	5		18	3	13
		4				

Notes to Table I

1. A number of independent candidates received official or unofficial party support, and these have been included in party totals where appropriate. Some Labour or I.L.P. candidates were supported by the Liberal party, and these are included in brackets.
2. Cheltenham was divided into six municipal wards each electing one councillor annually. In 1894, following a boundary extension three of the wards were

- substantially altered and in consequence all three councillors in these wards were re-elected in that year.
3. In 1900 Gloucester city boundaries were extended and the number of wards was increased from four (three electing two councillors and one electing three each year) to ten (each electing one councillor annually). The complete council was elected in 1900.
 4. Tewkesbury formed a single municipal ward electing four councillors annually. The elections of 1894, 1898, 1901-3 and 1911-13 were by party agreement uncontested.
 5. Stroud formed a single ward electing 18 district councillors. The whole council was elected in 1894, and there were annual elections for one third of the members until 1898. The parties agreed on the re-election of retiring members to avoid contests, but in 1897 two independents forced a contest. From 1898 the whole council was elected triennially.
 6. After 1907 the Liberal party did not officially promote candidates and those Liberals who stood did so as individuals.

Table 2. Percentage poll of Liberal candidates in general elections in Gloucestershire 1885-1910

	1885	1886	1892	1895	1900	1906	J.1910	D.1910	Bye-election ¹
Cheltenham	43.5	40.5	44.6	46.1	c.u2	<u>52.7</u> ³	49.1	<u>50.6</u>	50.0
Gloucester	<u>56.3</u>	<u>52.7</u>	<u>50.7</u>	46.1	<u>51.8</u>	<u>52.9</u>	49.2	50.0	
Cirencester	<u>54.3</u>	<u>L.u.u</u>	50.9	48.8	c.u.	<u>53.</u>	44.7	45.6	
Forest of Dean	<u>68.0</u>	<u>61.3</u>	<u>64.6</u>	<u>L.u</u>	<u>66.4</u>	<u>L.u</u>	<u>65.2</u>	<u>66.3</u>	<u>66.5</u>
Stroud	<u>51.7</u>	45.8	<u>51.1</u>	46.6	<u>51.7</u>	<u>56.1</u>	<u>51.6</u>	<u>51.0</u>	
Tewkesbury	49.0	c.u.	45.1	c.u.	c.u.	49.4	44.7	48.0	
Seats won	4	2	4	1	3	5	2	3	

Notes to Table 2

1. Bye-elections were held in February, 1911 in the Forest of Dean, and in April, 1911 in Cheltenham. Earlier bye-elections in the Forest and Cirencester have been omitted.
2. Unopposed returns are indicated:-
 c.u. - Conservative
 L.u. - Liberal
 L.u.u. - Liberal Unionist.
3. Successful Liberal candidates are underlined.

Notes

¹ P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour, the Struggle for London* (London, 1967), p. 179 and Ch. 8.

² K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868–1922* (Cardiff, 1970), p. 243 and Ch. 6.

³ K.O. Fox, 'The Emergence of the Political Labour Movement in the South Wales Coalfield 1894–1910' (M.A. thesis, University of Wales, 1965), p. 128 and Ch. 4.

⁴ M.D. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the "New Liberalism"?' *Journal of Modern History*, 1, 3 (1978).

⁵ P. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 401 and see generally Ch. 8 and Ch. 15.

⁶ G.L. Bernstein, 'Liberalism and the progressive alliance in the constituencies 1900–1914: three case studies', *Historical Journal*, 26, 3 (1983), 617–640.

⁷ A fuller description of the social and political history of the area may be found in J.R. Howe, 'The political history of the parliamentary constituencies of Cheltenham, Gloucester and the Cirencester and Tewkesbury divisions of Gloucestershire 1895–1914', (unpublished thesis for M. Litt., University of Bristol, 1977), 1–18. The Thornbury division, which looked socially, economically and politically to Bristol rather than to Gloucester, is not considered in this article.

⁸ See for example *Gloucester Liberal Association Rules* (n.d., circa 1890), Gloucester City Library local Collection, N.F. 13.76.; or a letter from Frank Lynn describing an ideal party structure, *Stroud Journal* (S.J.), 27 Jan, 1893.

⁹ Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, 129.

¹⁰ See for example remarks by Alfred Apperly at adoption meeting of the Stroud Liberal candidate in 1895, *S.J.*, 28 June, 1895.

¹¹ The archives of all the local Liberal parties have disappeared and the descriptions which follow are based on information gained from a detailed study of all the local newspapers.

¹² Biographical material from the local press and from *The Liberal Agent*, 55, Jan. 1909.

¹³ *Gloucester Journal*, (G.J.), 20 May, 1899.

¹⁴ *G.J.*, 26 Sept. 1908.

¹⁵ *G.J.*, 1 Mar. 1913, 3 Aug. 1912, 17 Feb. 1906; Gloucester League of Young Liberals *Annual Reports* 1906–13, Gloucester City Library Local Collection, NF 13. 11 (1–6).

¹⁶ M.P. Price, *My Three Revolutions*, (London, 1969), pt 3, Ch. 1–2.

¹⁷ *Cheltenham Echo*, 3 Dec., 1903.

¹⁸ *Cheltenham Free Press* (C.F.P.) 4 Feb., 1 Apl., 1905, 11 May 1907; *Cheltenham Examiner* (C.E.) 23 Mar. 1911, 10 Apl., 1913.

¹⁹ *Cheltenham Chronicle* (C.C.) 1 Apl., 1911; *C.E.*, 30 Mar. and 6 Apl., 1911; *The Times*, 29, 30, 31 Mar., and 1 Apl., 1911.

²⁰ Having been unseated, Mr. Mathias was disqualified from standing for Cheltenham for seven years; it had been expected that a redistribution bill would be passed which would create a new constituency by merging Cheltenham and part of Tewkesbury for which he would be able to stand. By 1913 it was clear that no bill could pass before the next general election. The entertainment by Mr. Rhys Williams' family of the Duke and Duchess of Teck at the family home in Glamorganshire featured prominently in the Cheltenham Society paper, the *Looker On*, 2 May 1914.

²¹ *C.C.*, 23 Sept, 1911.

²² *C.E.*, 23 Mar., 1911.

²³ *S.J.*, 29 Sept., 1893, 12 Jan, 11 May, 1894.

²⁴ *S.J.*, 20 Mar., 1914. Writing to the chief whip about Mr. Harrison's qualities at the time of the Ludlow bye-election Jesse Herbert commented that 'he is a very good lieutenant but not good enough to be a General in command; he is too fond of spending his time on the platform . . .' J. Herbert to H. Gladstone, Viscount Gladstone Papers, British Library Add. MSS, CXXII, f96.

²⁵ *S.J.*, 8 and 15 May, 1914.

²⁶ Mr. King's local career after 1914 suggests considerable ability. After successfully organising local recruitment for the war he joined up himself and was badly wounded. No longer fit for war service, he returned to the Stroud Liberal agency, ran the victorious general election campaign in 1918, was elected to the U.D.C. and served as its chairman in 1924.

²⁷ *C.F.P.*, 31 Aug., 1895, *C.E.*, 8 July, 1896.

²⁸ *C.F.P.*, *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard (W.G.S.)*, 17 Sept., 1892; B. McGill, 'Francis Schnadhorst and the Liberal party organisation', *Journal of Modern History*, XXIV, (1962), 33.

²⁹ Among them were Fred Horne, one of the Liberal party's leading speakers on agriculture, and candidate for Ludlow in the bye-election of December 1903 and in January 1906; and for Barkston Ash in January and December 1910; and the Revd Sylvester Horne who was M.P. for Ipswich from December 1910 until 1914.

³⁰ Information from *W.G.S.*, *C.F.P.*, and *The East Gloucestershire Liberal Monthly*, 1-IV, 1908-11, in the local collection of the Bingham Library, Cirencester.

³¹ By an astonishing coincidence he like Mr. Arnold and Mr. Harrison had been Liberal agent in Sleaford before coming to Gloucestershire.

³² *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 5 Nov., 1910.

³³ *G.J.*, 17 June, 1911, 9 Nov., 1912, 20 Dec., 1913; *Tewkesbury Weekly Record*, 28 Dec., 1912.

³⁴ J.R. Howe, 'Sir Charles Dilke as M.P. for the Forest of Dean', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archeological Society*, C. 1982, 241-8.

³⁵ This is illustrated by the collapse of Liberal organisation in Cheltenham middle ward following the death of Councillor Steele in 1900, *C.C.*, 13 Apl., 1901, or the work of the Liberal councillors in Gloucester east ward, which in 1895 had only one Liberal councillor out of six, and by 1899 had five. *G.J.*, 4 Nov., 1899.

³⁶ *C.C.*, 26 Oct., 1907, 7 Nov., 1908, 21 Oct., 1911.

³⁷ In 1903 W.J. Merret stood as Liberal and Labour candidate in the east ward but members of the I.L.P. subsequently objected to cooperation with the Liberals. He was invited by the Trades and Labour Council to stand again in 1904 but he replied that since it could guarantee only £5 the election should be fought 'on the same lines as last year'. The clear implication is that Liberal endorsement would provide additional funds. In fact the Trades Council insisted on complete independence, Mr. Merret stood simply as a Liberal and won the seat. Cheltenham Trades and Labour Council Minutes, 3, 1902-6, Gloucester County Record Office, D 3614/1/3.

³⁸ *G.J.*, 14 Oct., 1911, 9 Nov., 1912, 1 & 8 Nov., 1913.

³⁹ Evidence of Mr. Langley-Smith in the trial of the Kingsholm ward election petition *G.J.*, 9 Feb., 1907.

⁴⁰ The number of contests at each election before 1914 was

1889	25	1898	7	1907	10
1892	7	1901	4	1910	6
1895	11	1904	24	1913	5

For most of the period, there were 57 councillors.

⁴¹ *G.J.*, 27 Sept., 1902, 5 Mar., 1904.

⁴² *S.J.*, Nov.-Dec. 1894, *G.J.*, Dec., 1894.

⁴³ *S.J.*, 1 Apl. 1904, 11 Apl. 1913.

⁴⁴ These figures are confirmed by the returns of candidates' expenses printed in the local press after most of the elections. Labour and independent candidates normally spent a great deal less – but were not usually elected.

⁴⁵ Letters from de Ferrières & Agg Gardner, *C.E.*, 22 and 29 Aug., 1894.

⁴⁶ Dorington to Hicks-Beach, 25 Aug., (1904), M.H. Hicks-Beach to Witts, 29 Aug., 1904; St. Aldwyn Papers, Misc/PP/3, Misc/PP/11/3.

⁴⁷ *G.J.*, 30 July 1898; Viscount Gladstone papers, B.L. Add. MS. 46021, f9, 46025, f 181, 46107, ff 16, 17, 25, 95, 137.

⁴⁸ *C.E.*, 30 Jan., 1901; *C.F.P.*, 22 Feb., 1902, 7 Mar., 1903.

⁴⁹ *C.E.*, 22 Feb., 1912, 6 Mar., 1913.

⁵⁰ *C.E.*, 28 Mar., 1912.

⁵¹ Evidence in the election petition trial, *I oc. cit. supra*, note 19.

⁵² Gloucester Liberal Association, *Annual Report* to 31 Mar., 1910, *List of Members and Balance Sheet* to 31 Mar., 1911; Gloucester Y.L.S *Annual Reports* 1910–13; Gloucester City Library Local Collection N 13. 38, N 13.85, N 13.11 (4–6); *Citizen*, 21 May 1912.

⁵³ *C.E.*, 13 Apl., 1911; *W.G.S.*, 8 Apl., 1911, 1 June, 1912, 24 May, 1913, 11 July, 1914. *East Gloucestershire Liberal Monthly*, IV, 11, Nov., 1911.

⁵⁴ *G.J.*, 17 June, 1911, 9 Nov., 1912, 20 Dec., 1913.

⁵⁵ Contemporary local estimates suggest that plural voters were usually about 20 per cent of the poll in Tewkesbury, 5 per cent in Cirencester and Stroud, and 2 per cent in Gloucester, some $\frac{2}{3}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ being Conservative. If these figures are correct, plural voters accounted for Liberal defeats in Gloucester and Tewkesbury in December, 1910; see J.R. Howe, 'The Political History of Gloucestershire', appendix V, 292.