



Labour Heritage

Bulletin Autumn 2016

**Josiah Wedgwood, Essex Conference,
Katharine Bruce Glasier, 1964 in Southall,
Victor Grayson (Book review)**

Josiah Wedgwood MP

By Richard Gorton

Early Life

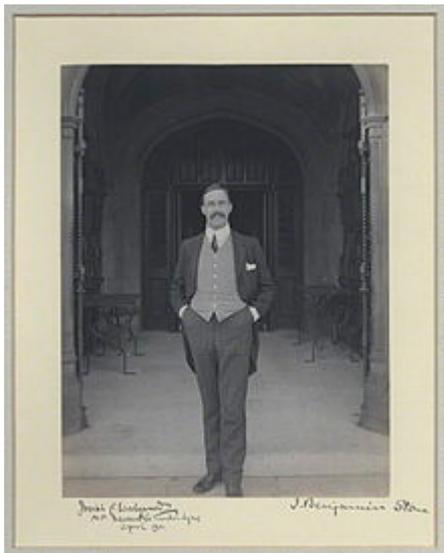
Josiah Clement Wedgwood was born at Barlaston in North Staffordshire on March 16th 1872. The great, great grandson of Josiah Wedgwood the master potter and founder of the world famous pottery business, Josiah Clement was a member of a leading and influential Staffordshire family. Educated at Clifton College, Bristol, Wedgwood did not go on to university nor did he join the family firm. Instead he trained as a naval engineer, first, with Armstrong's, one of the leading Tyneside shipbuilders, and then with the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. Through his mother's family, the Rendels, Wedgwood was introduced to the great Liberal families of the North East: the Trevelyan, the Peases, the Greys and the Runcimans. During the early 1890s, Wedgwood joined the Fabian Society, spoke at Fabian meetings, he met William Gladstone and attended the 1891 Trades Union Congress. Any ambition that Wedgwood may have had to enter national politics was halted

by the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899. He volunteered for military service and was sent to South Africa as officer of the Elswick Battery, officially known as the 1st Northumberland Voluntary Artillery. Wedgwood seems to have spent a year pursuing Boer commandoes across the Transvaal. His experience of South Africa gave Wedgwood a love of the vast open space of the veldt. Once peace had been concluded and Wedgwood had been discharged from the army, he secured a post as the resident magistrate of the Ermelo-Carolina district. Life in South Africa suited Wedgwood. He enjoyed the independence, the constant travel and had a high regard for the Cape Governor, Sir Alfred Milner. However, Wedgwood's career as a colonial civil servant was brought to an abrupt end by the ill-health of his wife, Ethel, and the challenge of raising a young family in the South African outback. His experiences in South Africa gave Wedgwood a paternalistic view of British imperialism which he saw as benign. In common with many Edwardian Liberals and some socialists, Wedgwood believed that it was possible to be both an imperialist and a social reformer.

Liberal MP

Wedgwood's return to North Staffordshire enabled him to concentrate on a career in politics. The Liberal association in Newcastle-

under-Lyme was seeking a candidate who could overturn a slender Liberal Unionist majority. Wedgwood was seen as an ideal candidate. His election address called for land taxes, old age pensions, free trade and improved compensation for injured workers. In the Liberal landslide of 1906, Wedgwood had little difficulty in winning the constituency and was to represent Newcastle-under-Lyme in Parliament for thirty-six years.



Wedgwood's political make-up was complex. Throughout his political career he was an incorrigible rebel, believing that members of parliament had a duty to challenge their parliamentary leaders. Between 1910 and 1914 Wedgwood voted against the Liberal Government on ten occasions, more than any other Liberal MP. He had a deep distaste for the paraphernalia of party management and discipline. While he may have been moved by the condition of the poor, Wedgwood did not believe that a powerful state was the answer. Opposition to collectivism, for example, prompted Wedgwood to oppose Lloyd George's National Insurance Act. Unlike many socialists and advanced Liberals, Wedgwood did not see big government and a powerful state as vehicles for social reform. He believed that social change would come through the taxation of land values.

In Edwardian England, supporters of land taxation were part of the political mainstream. The intellectual father of the land taxation movement was the American economist, Henry George. Wedgwood became a lifelong convert and his faith in George's work was absolute and without condition. He became and remained a fervent Single-Taxer.

Wedgwood's reservations over the value of 'New Liberal' legislation did not reflect a wider hostility to organised labour. In 1911, Wedgwood spoke on behalf of striking railway workers and, at the cost of some loss to his local popularity, defended Tom Mann and Fred Crowsley, when they had been charged with incitement to mutiny. Wedgwood backed the miners during their strike in 1913, confessing in a letter to Charles Wedgwood that 'he was more radical than the miners'.

Josiah Wedgwood was not among the Liberal MPs who opposed Britain's entry into the First World War. He argued that a new European order could only be created if German militarism was defeated. Having supported the War, Wedgwood concluded that he could only encourage others to join the military, if he volunteered for active service.

Wedgwood was wounded at Gallipoli in May 1915; his courage under fire was recognised by the award of a Distinguished Service Order (DSO). After a period of convalescence, Wedgwood returned to Westminster, where, despite his distaste for collectivism, he supported the introduction of conscription. As a member of a Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of the war in Mesopotamia, Wedgwood characteristically issued a minority report in which he refused to blame local commanders for the failings of their senior officers. He also used his minority report to argue the case for Indian home rule.

Wedgwood may have supported the war against Germany, but he did not want a vindictive peace. The stalemate on the western front convinced Wedgwood that a negotiated

peace brokered by the American President Woodrow Wilson offered the best hope of stopping the slaughter. Speaking in the House of Commons on 4th April 1917, Wedgwood argued that Britain ‘should by-pass the Kaiser by making a direct appeal to the German people for a negotiated peace that brought less than total victory as long as it was along the lines laid down by President Wilson’.

In the immediate post-war period, Wedgwood warned that the Versailles settlement would undermine democratic government in Germany and could not provide the basis for a fair and lasting peace. He was one of the MPs who refused to cheer Lloyd George when the prime minister entered the chamber after signing the Versailles Treaty.

Joining Labour

Wedgwood stood as an Independent Liberal in the 1918 General Election, a title which emphasised that he was not tied to the Lloyd George remnant of the Liberal Party and therefore could not be counted a supporter of the Coalition Government. Within months of the opening of the 1918 Parliament, Wedgwood had joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and was a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). The emergence of Labour as the main opposition to the Conservatives encouraged large numbers of Liberal activists to shift their political loyalty. In his own constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Wedgwood claimed that between a half and two-thirds of local Liberals defected with him to the Labour Party.

Wedgwood’s daughter, Helen, recorded that by early 1919 her father agreed with the ILP on a range of domestic and international issues. The fact that the ILP supported the introduction of a land tax must have provided a powerful inducement for Wedgwood to abandon the Liberals. In fact, Wedgwood saw the ILP as the branch of the Labour Movement that would uphold traditional Liberal values, such as internationalism and dissent.

Wedgwood’s early years in the Parliamentary Labour Party saw his political career reach its height. As several of Labour’s national leaders were out of Parliament, Wedgwood was able to step into the limelight. In the 1919 session, Wedgwood asked 402 questions and his parliamentary speeches occupied 230 columns in *Hansard*. During this period, the *Daily News* was fulsome in its praise:

Of the back bench Labour men, Col. Wedgwood is far and away the most distinguished. His interests are so various, his spirit so militant, his crusading temper so keen and high and his parliamentary skill so considerable that he constitutes an opposition by himself.

Cabinet Minister

Success followed success. In 1919, Wedgwood was given a place on the PLP’s Policy Committee. A year later, he defeated Jimmy Thomas in a ballot for one of the PLP’s vice chairmanships. By 1922, Wedgwood was a member of Labour’s front bench and widely regarded as the Party’s leading spokesman on foreign and colonial policy.

Wedgwood’s parliamentary experience and reputation appeared to qualify him for high ministerial office when Ramsay MacDonald formed the first Labour Cabinet in January 1924. Instead of a major ministry, Wedgwood was offered the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster, a non-departmental Cabinet post largely concerned with the co-ordination of government policy. Wedgwood must have found his relegation to the lower ranks of the Cabinet irksome. Even his membership of the Cabinet Committee on Indian Affairs produced little of substance as the Viceroy, Lord Reading, blocked the modest reforms proposed by the MacDonald Government. His colleague, Sidney Webb, described Wedgwood as ‘a sullen and discontented colleague’.

The fall of the first Labour Government in October 1924 ended Wedgwood's ministerial career. Although he remained an MP until December 1941, Wedgwood never held office again. There are several reasons why Wedgwood's career faltered after 1924. When Wedgwood joined the PLP in 1919, talent and ability in the Labour ranks were pretty scarce. Many of Labour's pre-war leaders, such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, were not in the House of Commons. Wedgwood's knowledge of foreign and colonial affairs, together with his experience as a parliamentarian, propelled him forward. By 1924, however, the PLP was much stronger, with the result that Wedgwood faced serious competition from talented parliamentary colleagues.

To many members of the labour movement, Wedgwood must have seemed out of step with Clause 4 of the Party's constitution. His views and values appeared rooted in nineteenth century Liberalism. Wedgwood's preoccupation with land taxation must have struck many ILP members as irrelevant and outdated, a relic of Edwardian liberalism. Unlike Jimmy Thomas, Wedgwood had no political base in the trades unions. It is true that with the support of the miners, Wedgwood was elected to Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) in 1924. However, Wedgwood was not able to consolidate his position on the NEC. In the following year, the miners shifted their support to another candidate, with the result that Wedgwood lost his NEC place.

Wedgwood was never a team player and preferred to be a rebel rather than a leader. His wayward, impulsive style irritated Ramsay MacDonald, who, after 1924, was reluctant to give Wedgwood front bench responsibility. Many MPs shared Wedgwood's low opinion of Ramsay MacDonald, but in the absence of an alternative leader, MacDonald stayed on and Wedgwood was excluded from Labour's inner circle.

Campaigning Back Bencher

Free from front bench responsibility, Wedgwood resumed his campaigns for the taxation of land values, Indian home rule and a Jewish homeland in Palestine. With the return of a minority Labour Government in May 1929, it seemed as if Wedgwood's long-standing commitment to the introduction of land taxation would be realised. The Labour Chancellor, Philip Snowden, was sympathetic and Snowden's 1931 Budget included provision for a penny in the pound tax on the annual value of land. Before the Budget legislation could be enacted, the Labour Cabinet fell, and the incoming National Government would not support a measure which increased the level of taxation carried by landlords. Undeterred, Wedgwood tried to introduce his own legislation, but in the face of Conservative opposition the taxation of land values made little progress.

If Wedgwood's long campaign for land taxation was to run dry, his support for Indian home rule was to strike a stronger cord. In the immediate post-war period, Wedgwood became convinced that Britain's membership of the League of Nations was incompatible with British imperialism and therefore the empire needed to evolve into a commonwealth. Wedgwood favoured self-government by giving India dominion status. While there was considerable support in the Labour Party for Indian self-government, Ramsay MacDonald wanted to maintain a bi-partisan approach. The statement by the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, that dominion status for India was the policy of the British government seemed a considerable step forward. Apart from demonstrating the depth of ethnic and religious differences within Indian society, successive Round Table Conferences, chaired by Ramsay MacDonald, achieved little. Confronted by increasing nationalist agitation in India, the British authorities arrested nationalist leaders, including Gandhi and

justified the clampdown by claiming that India was not yet ready for self-government.

Wedgwood had little patience with government policy on India. He argued that arresting nationalist leaders was counterproductive and instead of negotiating with Indian princes, the British Government should talk to the nationalist parties. As successive British cabinets had no clear timetable for Indian self-government, there was little chance of India becoming an equal partner in the greater commonwealth envisaged by Wedgwood. The National Government's White Paper and subsequent India Act were both denounced by Wedgwood, who may have drawn some consolation from the fact that Clement Attlee largely shared his view that India must be a free and equal member of the British Commonwealth.

If Wedgwood's campaigns for land taxes and Indian self-government had little impact on government policy, he had much more success when he launched a major scholarly venture: the preparation of a history of Parliament from 1258 to 1832. The study involved compiling biographies of MPs who had sat in Parliament from the early Middle Ages through to the Great Reform Act of 1832. For Wedgwood this vast undertaking was not designed solely to add to scholarship and knowledge. He believed that progress to democracy and freedom under the law had been a distinguishing feature of the England's parliamentary history. In the age of Stalin and Hitler, Wedgwood wanted to compile a history of Parliament which reaffirmed liberal values. Wedgwood raised much of the funding for the project and assembled a team of leading historians. The first volume of the *History of Parliament*, containing the biographies of 2,600 MPs who sat in Parliament between 1439 and 1509, was published in 1936. Much of the work on this volume was done by Wedgwood. Other volumes were published after Wedgwood's death. Wedgwood's energy,

persistence and commitment ensured that this huge study was launched.

Wedgwood's political instincts were not always sound and he was often out of step with public opinion. Unlike many MPs and much of the British establishment, Wedgwood quickly appreciated the threat posed to European peace and security by Nazi Germany. He was an early and outspoken critic of appeasement. In a speech in the House of Commons only months after Hitler came to power in January 1933 Wedgwood urged ministers:

to take a firm line at first and never to give way to weakness. If you do that you will encourage force. Do not let us rewrite the old history of the end of the Roman Empire, continually buying off hordes by concessions to people whose appetite you merely whet by your conciliation.

Wedgwood's opposition to fascism was not confined to speaking in the House of Commons. Through his chairmanship of the German Refugee Hospitality Committee, Wedgwood gave practical help to the victims of Nazi persecution. In early 1938, just after Hitler's troops entered Austria, Wedgwood urged the British Government not to tighten visa restrictions on Austrian Jews. He also tried, without success, to introduce legislation that would have given UK residency to German and Austrian Jews who wanted to escape from Nazi persecution.

At the age of sixty-eight and in poor health, Wedgwood volunteered to join the Home Guard when it was formed in the summer of 1940. During the early years of the War, Wedgwood drafted a series of notes and memoranda for Winston Churchill on subjects ranging from the inefficiency of aircraft carriers to the defence of London in the event of a German invasion. He also found time to write his memoirs and compile an anthology of poetry and prose devoted to the celebration of liberty. The anthology was well received

and enjoyed a large readership, selling 50,000 copies in three months.

Evening Honours

In December 1941, Wedgwood, the old radical, accepted Winston Churchill's offer of a peerage and became: First Baron Wedgwood of Barlaston. Wedgwood's membership of the House of Lords was curtailed by the heart disease that had troubled him for some years. He died on 26th July 1943 and was buried near the Wedgwood family home at Barlaston. Inscribed on Wedgwood's grave stone are the following words provided by his friend, Winston Churchill:

The distressed of the whole world learned to look to him and through him to Parliament for the redress of wrongs.

Josiah Wedgwood's political career spanned the pre-1914 Liberal Party of Asquith and Lloyd George and the Labour Party of Ramsay MacDonald, George Lansbury and Clement Attlee. Within the Labour Party, Wedgwood upheld the radical tradition of dissent and internationalism. His life and contribution to British politics deserve to be remembered.

Further Reading

Mulvery, P. The Political Life of Josiah C. Wedgwood, Land, Liberty and Empire, 1872-1943

Wedgwood, C.V. The Last of the Radicals: Josiah Wedgwood MP

Essex Conference on Labour History

The fifteenth Essex Conference on Labour History was held on Saturday 29th October at the Witham Labour Hall. As in previous years it was well attended and it had a packed agenda with four excellent speakers. It was organised by Labour Heritage and the Essex Labour Campaign Forum.



Harlow Group at the Essex Labour Conference

Aneurin Bevan and John Beckett MP

The first speaker was Francis Beckett, who had the task of comparing the political lives of Aneurin Bevan, and his own father John Beckett. Both were born at the end of the 19th century and were MPs in the 1929-1931 Labour government. But they had come from very different backgrounds. Bevan had been a miner and a branch official in the Miners Federation of Great Britain. Beckett, on the other hand, had come from a family of Cheshire farmers. His father was a draper but had become bankrupt in the 1920s. As a result of this, Beckett was drawn to socialist politics and joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Due to his friendships with Attlee, for whom he served as an agent, and the historian H.M. Trevelyan, he was offered the parliamentary seat of Gateshead in 1925, a town which he had never visited before. In 1929 he was to be elected for Peckham in London. Bevan won Ebbw Vale for Labour in the same year.

Beckett's first loyalty was to the ILP, for which he was the Parliamentary whip. In 1929 18 ILP MPs were elected and they remained a distinct group in Parliament, marginalised in the Parliamentary Labour Party by Ramsay MacDonald, who refused to offer any of them a job in his government. As unemployment rose both Bevan and Beckett were amongst Labour MPs who felt increasingly frustrated at the failure of the government to address the problem. But they took different political directions. Bevan stuck solidly with the Labour Party, believing that there was no alternative. He joined the left-wing Socialist League in the 1930s, which was to lead, temporarily, to his expulsion from the Party. However he came back, and was a frequent critic of the Coalition Government during World War 2. When Attlee became Prime Minister in 1945 he appointed Bevan as Minister for Health, and he went on to set up the National Health Service. Francis observed that this was not inevitable. In the early years, it would have been more likely that Bevan would have remained a trades union official.

John Beckett however threw in his hand with Oswald Mosley. The ILP lost John Wheatley, its leader who died in 1930, and it never recovered. When Mosley, an MP in MacDonald's government, called for job creation and public investment to solve unemployment (the Mosley Memorandum), this attracted the support of a number of Labour MPs. Getting no support from the Labour Prime Minister for this, they left Labour and set up the New Party. This was to become the British Union of Fascists. Beckett split with Mosley in 1937, but he remained a fascist sympathiser and was imprisoned with the Mosleyites during World War 2. In prison they even dreamt of forming a provisional government in Britain if Hitler had invaded. Why did Beckett take this political direction? Francis believes that his father gave up on 'thinking' for 'feeling' and, although a former rebel, he gave up and allowed himself to be led by others. Francis has written a book about his

father. (Fascist in the Family: the Tragedy of John Beckett MP, Routledge, 2016).

1916 Easter Rising in Dublin

The second speaker was Ivan Gibbons, Director of the Irish Cultural Centre, Hammersmith and former Director of Irish Studies at St Mary's University, Twickenham. He spoke about the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, in a year when its anniversary has attracted many commemorations. He said that in Ireland it was not just history – it could have happened yesterday. It had led to the formation of an independent Ireland. Putting the Easter Rising into historical context, Ivan explained that independence for Ireland had not been foreseen at the beginning of the 20th century. It was expected that there would be some form of Home Rule within the Empire. At the outbreak of World War 1, Irish Catholics joined the British Army, many more than were involved in the 1916 Uprising. There was initially hostility among the working class population of Dublin to the Easter Rising. A small number of rebels had tried to claim the moral right to use violence on behalf of the whole population. However the scale of repression which followed, with fifteen of its leaders being executed, together with the introduction of conscription in Ireland in 1917, was to turn opinion around. Ireland was on course for a violent break with the rest of the UK, although on the basis of guerrilla warfare, not armed insurrection. Ivan explained that James Connolly's Citizen Army had been set up during the defeat suffered by the Dublin working class in the Lockout in 1913. The Irish Labour Party, although it still had a lot of support, did not contest the 1918 elections in Ireland. This had weakened its potential role in an independent Ireland up to the present day. It had obtained some concessions from Sinn Fein such as guaranteeing equality for women. When the Party had contested the 1922 election, 17 out of 18 of its candidates had been elected.

Ireland became an independent country as a result of the Easter Uprising, but remains partitioned with revolutionary republicanism unable to attract the support of the Protestant unionist population of Ulster.

George Lansbury and the Poplar Rates Dispute

In the afternoon Chris Sumner, from the George Lansbury Memorial Trust, spoke about 1921 and the Poplar Rates Dispute. Lansbury was a convert from Liberalism to Socialism, and in 1903 he was elected as one of four Labour councillors for Poplar (now part of the borough of Tower Hamlets). They formed an influential group on the Council and succeeded in getting a new orphanage for the borough, the Hutton Training School, which opened at Brentwood, Essex. This was to house 750 children from Poplar.



George Lansbury in Poplar

In the 1919 local elections, Labour gained control of Poplar Council, winning 39 out of 42 seats. This included five women councillors. Local councils were responsible for the relief of the poor in those days, and Poplar, a working class borough, was to suffer from the effects of the post war slump, with jobs lost on the docks and in transport. Increasingly it came under pressure as more people became in need of poor law relief, and could not raise enough money to provide for them. This contrasted with very low rates levied in richer London boroughs such as Kensington. The Poplar councillors called for an equalisation of the rates across London, and

in order to get this, they refused to pay their share of the rates to the London County Council (LCC). In 1921 they raised a rate only to cover their local commitments. The LCC took legal action against the councillors, who were faced with the threat of arrest. They did not give in and arrests started to take place. The men including George Lansbury were sent to Brixton Prison, where they successfully campaigned to be kept in unlocked cells and to hold council meetings. The women, including one who was seven months pregnant were sent to Holloway. After some legal intervention, they were offered the opportunity to 'apologise' and were released from prison. Their proposal to have an equalisation of the rates throughout London was accepted by the LCC. They had won and the councillors led a victory march from Poplar to the LCC. Thousands of local people supported the councillors in their fight. The march was led by Charlie Sumner, then Deputy Mayor of Poplar, Chris Sumner's grandfather. As a result of the LCC's equalisation of rates across London, the Westminster rate went up by 7 pence, the Poplar rate fell by 3 shillings and three pence. Today the cuts in government subsidies to councils, affecting poorest parts of the country the most, bring to light the plight of Poplar Council in 1920.

Stan Newens : a Life in the Labour Movement

The final speaker was Stan Newens on his life in the labour movement. Stan remembered when Leah Manning was elected as Labour MP for Epping in 1945. He was living in North Weald and was working in a pea-field when he heard the news. He joined Epping CLP in 1949, when he was studying history at UCL. When he supported the Labour candidate in 1950, he was shunned by some of his former neighbours. Sadly Leah Manning lost the seat in 1950 and the local Tories celebrated by burning her effigy.

Stan moved to Stoke on Trent to work in the mines. This was his National Service, an

alternative to fighting in the Korean War. At the Kemble Colliery, he was involved in an altercation when he defended Italians who were working there. He survived the experience due to the support of fellow miners. He became active in the NUM and led a strike for better pay and conditions.

He returned to North Weald and became assistant secretary of Epping CLP and agent in the 1959 General Election. He had taken up teaching in Hackney and became active in the NUT.

He joined the Movement for Colonial Freedom, led by Fenner Brockway. When this became Liberation he became its Chairman for thirty years. When he stood down to become President, he was to be succeeded by Jeremy Corbyn.

In 1956 he remembers distributing leaflets for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in protest at Eden's policy of invading Egypt during the Suez Crisis. The Labour Party had taken over the organisation of the demonstration which attracted thousands of young people. Following this the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary led to discontent within the Communist Party of Great Britain, giving the Left an opportunity to regroup. *New Left Review* was launched, as was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Stan broke his links with the Socialist Review Group, and joined Victory for Socialism, which campaigned for political change within the Labour Party. In 1960 the Party adopted a policy of supporting CND, for which Stan had been a keen supporter. In 1961 this policy was reversed. Stan was adopted as the Parliamentary candidate for Epping. After a successful election campaign, attracting CND supporters and workers from Fords, he won the seat unexpectedly for Labour in 1964. Epping and Ilford South, won by Arnold Shaw gave Harold Wilson effectively his majority in Parliament. Along with other left-wing MPs Stan helped to persuade 35 Labour MPs to abstain on a motion to support the US war in

Vietnam. This was to shape government policy, and Britain did not send troops to Vietnam. Stan was one of the founder members of the left wing Tribune Group in Parliament. He became a pro Wilson loyalist however, when the Prime Minister faced a challenge from Roy Jenkins, MP, who was on the right of the Party.

In the 1970 General Election Stan lost his Epping seat. His criticism of Israel's refusal to withdraw from the West Bank had alienated Jewish voters in the constituency. Out of Parliament, Stan was elected President of the London Co-operative Society. In 1974 however he was elected as MP for Harlow, a seat which he held until 1983. His downfall in 1983 he believes was largely as a result of the Thatcherite 'right to buy policy' for council house tenants. Harlow council tenants rushed to buy the houses which Stan had campaigned to be built. Opposing local development plans, Stan had argued for houses with gardens, rather than flats. He also thought that he had upset local Catholics by supporting the right to abortion. Nationally however he said that the 1983 defeat had been brought about by the Gang of Four and the formation of the Social Democratic Party. This was to split the Labour vote and allow the Tories to form a government with minority support.

Never elected to Parliament again, Stan became the MEP for Central London from 1984-1999. He is still active in the Harlow Labour Party, having been a member of the Party for 67 years. He is of the left, but says, he was always 'his own man', and on some issues had parted company with left-wing colleagues.

There was time at the end of the conference for questions and discussion. A round of thanks was given to members of Braintree and Witham CLP who provided us with lunch. We look forward to the 16th Conference next year.

Foundation of the Co-operative Party

By John Grigg

At its 1917 congress in Swansea the Co-operative Societies decided to found a political party – The Co-operative Party. This was in response to what it saw as discrimination and hostility towards the movement at national government level and by local administrative bodies. When war broke out in 1914 the Co-operative Wholesale Society sold stocks of flour to the army at pre-war prices. It sold butter at less than market price and tea, sugar and canned goods at lower than the maximum prices determined by the government. This of course undercut private traders. Some societies introduced fair distribution schemes before the government introduced rationing.

When conscription was introduced in 1916 employers could apply to the local military service tribunals for exemption for essential employees. Local traders often had an influential presence on these tribunals, and the co-operative societies felt they were discriminated against, their managers and employees not being granted exemption from army service as much as those of private traders.

The government introduced an Excess Profits Tax, which was applied to Co-op Society surpluses. The societies considered themselves to be non-profit making and surpluses were distributed to their members (the 'divi') based on purchases made and mutual savings of the members. In 1916/17 over £1,000,000 was paid by the CWS in Excess Profits Tax.

When rationing was introduced Lord Davenport was appointed Food Controller. He had accumulated wealth from his grocery wholesale business of Kearly and Tonge. Local Food Control Committees were given responsibility for distribution of supplies to local shops. The Co-operative societies claimed that these committees favoured the

private shops to the detriment of the co-operative stores.

At the 1917 congress it was argued that political representation in Parliament was necessary in order to more effectively lobby against what was seen as discrimination against the Co-operative movement.

A Visit to the Katharine Bruce Glasier Memorial Youth Hostel, Glen Cottage, Earby

By Steve Thompson

Wednesday 1st June 2016

For a long time I have had the intention of getting to know more about Lancashire, so I looked up a Youth Hostel in the general area and came up with Earby, a place which I had never heard of, to spend a couple of days in the Pendle area.

It seemed a good idea. The train and bus got me to Earby in time to visit the village library and as a usual, was drawn to the local history section. The first book which I noticed (there were three copies) was the story of Earby Cooperative Society by Bob Abel and Stephanie Carter, published by the local history society. Then, a pamphlet about Katharine Bruce Glasier who, I discovered had lived in Earby. This too was written by Bob Abel as a history society publication.

Then it was 5 o'clock closing time, which coincided with the 5 o'clock opening time of the Youth Hostel. I was amazed to see the blue plaque on the wall of Earby Youth Hostel, stating that this had been the home of Katharine Bruce Glasier from 1922 until her death in 1950.

Bob Abel had donated a book to the Hostel, *The Enthusiasts* – a biography of John and Katharine Bruce Glasier by Laurence Thompson, published 1971. I began to read it while I was staying at the hostel and when I got home, bought a copy and have now read it all.



Blue plaque on the Earby Youth Hostel

Katharine was one of those people who really made a difference through her tireless commitment to a gentler and kinder world. A world where poverty, deprivation and the resulting misery would no longer be looked on with indifference but where everyone could strive together for the dignity of all. Katharine was a socialist and a humanitarian.

The Independent Labour Party was more than a political party, and still is. To many who joined, it was a great social fellowship. The ILP was founded in 1893. Keir Hardie chaired the inaugural conference and he was the first person to be elected as an independent Labour MP.

Katharine Bruce Glasier was a member of the founding National Administrative Council at a time when women were restricted to 'women's groups' in other political parties. She played a vital part in the life of the ILP from its beginning, to the time when it played a part in founding the Labour Party in 1906 and to the time when it disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932. She wrote for the ILP newspaper the *Labour Leader*, becoming its editor in 1916.

Katharine was a speaker and educator, a wife and mother. The story of the ILP is about people and a fine book about all of the people who played a part in its story is '*Keir Hardie*' by Caroline Benn published in 1997.

I quote from the booklet by Bob Abel:

Following her death discussions began as to how Katharine Bruce Glasier's (KBG) life could be commemorated. And in May of 1952 a memorial fund was inaugurated and ideas were discussed as to how KBG's memory

could be perpetuated. One suggestion was to buy Glen Cottage and the two adjacent cottages and adjoining land, to be used for some social purpose. On display at the meeting was a model of Glen Cottage made by Welbury Holgate of Earby, a renowned local historian and archaeologist. Donations from individuals and organisations soon began to swell the fund. The list read like a who's who of prominent Labour MPs and Peers of the Realm and include Tony Benn, Lord Silkin, personalities such as the actress Dame Sybil Thorndyke and the organisations with which KBG had been associated - the Co-operative movement, the National Union of Mineworkers, Friends Meetings and the Labour Party Women's Associations. By 1955 a plan to redevelop the cottages as a Youth Hostel was enthusiastically approved and in 1956 a final appeal was launched to raise the last £1,000 required.

In 1958 the Earby Youth Hostel was opened as a permanent memorial to Katharine Bruce Glasier

Thursday 2nd June 2016

Bob Abel called in and told me a few things about the hostel. I already knew that it was a model hostel, performing the service which Youth Hostels were set up to provide. The other hostellers were cyclists and walkers and Earby is perfectly situated for long distance walkers and cyclists and people exploring the area.

It seems, though, that the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) decided to close and sell it 10 years ago in order to focus on larger and more profitable Youth Hostels. This was contested because it had been bought as a 'Permanent Memorial to Katharine Bruce Glasier'. The YHA's response was that this had not been recorded in the legal papers and so the decision to sell it went ahead.

At the eleventh hour, Pendle District Council stepped in and bought it. It is now on a 'peppercorn' lease to the YHA. This lease has to be renewed every five years and the time for renewal again falls in October this year.

The YHA are concerned about the cost of its upkeep, despite benefiting from the capital raised at the sale ten years ago and having it

virtually rent free. Sadly the latest news is that the YHA will not be renewing the lease and it is due to close in January. There is an ongoing campaign to keep the hostel open.

Race and Class in Britain: the 1964 General Election in Southall

By Barbara Humphries

The 1964 General Election saw the election of a Labour Government with a small majority after thirteen years of Conservative rule. It was also notable for being the first time in post-war Britain that race and immigration featured in the election campaign. Labour candidates in constituencies which had received large numbers of immigrants from the New Commonwealth were targeted by some Conservatives and the far right British National Party. The most infamous of these was Smethwick in the west Midlands. An election poster bearing the slogan : ‘ If you want a n..... for a neighbour vote Labour’ gained the campaign notoriety. This would be illegal under the UK’s current race relations laws. The Labour candidate, Patrick Gordon Walker, lost his seat to an anti-immigration Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths., a man who had been involved in the Birmingham Immigration Control Association. In Slough barrister and strong race relations campaigner, Fenner Brockway also lost his seat.

Immigration had not hitherto been a party political issue. The British Nationality Act of 1948 introduced by the Labour Government to enable the recruiting of workers from the Caribbean and Indian Sub continent (the New Commonwealth) to fill vacancies in industry, transport and the health service was not challenged by the Conservatives. Immigration continued on their watch in the 1950s. In 1961 however, Conservative Party conference had called for immigration controls and this was followed by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962. This used a voucher system to

restrict entry. In fact immigration increased as there was a dash to beat the deadline. This Act was opposed by Labour, stating that it would be disastrous for Commonwealth relations. It added that when in office employment and housing issues would be addressed, and that legislation would be introduced to outlaw racial discrimination.

Southall was an industrial suburb of west London. A railway town described as ‘a working class fraternity’ by Syd Bidwell MP, it had many factories such as AEC, which made buses for London Transport. Labour politics had been dominant in the town even before 1945. During the interwar years Labour had run the local Urban District Council. As part of the Uxbridge parliamentary division it had contributed to the growing electoral support for Labour across the area, and in 1945 when the new Southall parliamentary division was created, it returned a massive Labour majority. Following boundary changes before the 1951 election this majority was reduced, as neighbouring Hayes and Harlington became a constituency in its own right. Nevertheless it remained a Labour constituency.

The strength of industrial development in Southall meant that it attracted migrant workers. In the 1930s for instance workers from South Wales came to live and work in the area. With growing unemployment they met with some hostility, with local workers believing that they would undercut wages.

In 1968 a resident of Southall for 33 years wrote to the *Middlesex County Times*, saying : They wanted what we had. Fine schools, libraries, parks – a fine town was murdered. A population explosion from 1928 to 1938. A fine town was murdered .. by the Irish, Welsh, people from the North.

After 1945 however there was full employment in the town. Employers had difficulty recruiting and one in particular, the Woolfs Rubber Company on the borders of

Hayes and Southall with its poor pay and conditions could not recruit locally. Its manager went out to the Punjab to recruit workers from India. They started arriving in the 1950s and within years the central part of the town had changed beyond recognition. In some streets there were a majority of Asians. Southall began to look like an Indian village transported into the London suburbs with temples, restaurants and an Indian cinema. By the 1964 general election there were 2,000 Asians from the Punjab living in Southall.

Although there was full employment, Woolfs was not well organised by trades unions. The management played a divide and rule policy. Asian workers formed 90% of the workforce but they were employed on different shifts to white workers. However there had been a strike for union recognition in 1962 when the Indian Workers Association worked with the Transport and General Workers Union to recruit Asian workers in a local house to house campaign. The union was recognised by the company, but some of its shop stewards were victimised, leading to a second strike in the winter of 1965. (see *Labour Heritage Bulletin* Autumn 2004 for an account of this strike.)

Many Asians were vastly over qualified for the work they did. A local campaign against racial discrimination estimated that over 84% of those in manual occupations had degrees from Indian universities. If they spoke English they could get a job on London Transport, where the Sikhs had to fight for their right to wear a turban. In factories such as AEC, some union representatives colluded with management to operate a 'colour bar', but lack of an apprenticeship would have barred many from a skilled engineering jobs. In 1963 the local Trades Council set up a Inter-racial Friendship Committee, due to the efforts of a worker priest at AEC, Martin Grubb. This was supported by Southall Labour Party.

Local concerns for the mainly working class population of Southall centred around housing and school places. Much of the housing in

Southall was in old terraced streets, but like the rest of west London there was a high level of working class home ownership. The local council, due to land shortages had not been able to embark on the sort of house building as had been done in neighbouring Hayes, or even in the (mainly Conservative controlled) borough of Ealing, after 1945. There was a housing waiting list and a five residential qualification was needed to get on to it. These concerns were ruthlessly exploited by the far right British National Party (BNP) who used the Southall Residents Association (SRA) as a front, and also the local Conservatives to go after Labour voters. The BNP had already chalked up successes in local elections in Southall in a clear threat to the Labour vote.

In council elections in 1963 BNP candidates stood in Glebe and Hambrough wards. In Hambrough they won 27.5% of the vote. almost one voter in three and came in second place. They claimed that Southall residents had been let down by what it called 'the orthodox political parties.'

Bob Wyatt, the Labour Party agent, reflecting on his time in Southall cited his battle with the evil of racism, and declared that the Party had lost votes, but had not lost a seat of any kind. Local councillor Tommy Steele however had claimed that over 4,000 votes had been lost the due to the 'coloured immigrant question.' By the 1964 election, the local Southall Party was struggling to keep to the official Labour Party line on immigration. The MP was George Pargiter, a former engineering worker who had worked at the AEC. He asked for permission to abstain rather than oppose the Conservative government's Commonwealth Immigrants Act, when it came up for renewal in 1963 because of the 'special situation that he faced in Southall.' His defection from the official Party line was hailed by the BNP candidate John Bean as the result of the success of his own campaign. However George Pargiter also faced down openly racist letters from some of his

constituents. He said that common humanity meant that discrimination had to be opposed. But he said that immigrants had to conform to 'our ways' and wanted to discourage further immigration into Southall.

The 1964 election campaign in Southall was a stormy affair. Candidates were shouted down as Southall was described by members of the SRA as a 'black slum.' There were complaints of overcrowding, public health orders not being enforced by the council and rubbish left in the street. Many of the Indian workers had difficulties in finding housing. Sometimes they clubbed together to buy, leading to multi-occupation and hot bedding. Gradually more were moving into Southall as white workers moved out. Meanwhile the SRA worked with House Agents to restrict the sale of property to Indians. This was before the race relations legislation of the 1960s.

Southall Labour Party was walking a tight rope between its 'traditional supporters' and the new Asian community, and canvassing was reported as being very unpleasant. Officials from Labour Head Office visited the constituency to discuss the local situation. The aim was to keep the Southall Party on board, but also to consider the position of 2,000 Asians who could be registered to vote. Which way would they vote? Other newcomers over the years such as the Welsh and Irish had allegiances to the labour movement as part of the British working class. Immigrants from the Punjab often had political traditions, which linked them to the Communist Party, which was not very strong in Britain, at least not electorally. The Southall IWA had been set up in 1957. It was partly a welfare organisation and gained assets such as restaurants and a cinema. It had links with the IWA nationally based in Birmingham. It had great sway over Asian voters.

Following discussions with the EC of Southall Labour Party it decided to advise its members to support Labour in 1964, and in council elections, as it was the party of the working

class, the Commonwealth, and it supported its housing policies. A later election leaflet issued in Punjabi added that Churchill would not have given India her independence. An example of how British foreign policy can affect political allegiances in a multi-ethnic nation. This support was not unconditional. The IWA often expressed disappointment with the performance of local MP George Pargiter. The option of standing its own candidates however was seen as a blind alley in a town with a long standing Labour tradition. So in 1964 George Pargiter was re-elected. The seat was not lost as in Slough and Smethwick, but this was because the anti-immigrant vote was split, between the BNP and the Conservatives. Pargiter did not gain an overall majority. But the turn-out was also very low, compared to previous elections. (Labour-18041, Conservative-16,144, BNP- 3410 turnout 70%).

At the 1966 general election Syd Bidwell increased Labour's majority, a trend which was to continue. As Pargiter's successor Syd Bidwell MP was very critical of his approach to the immigration question. Bidwell would offer the hand of friendship to the newcomers. For this he received the praise of the local IWA.

In 1965 elections were held for the new Ealing Council, which Labour unexpectedly won. The Conservatives put forward a policy to raise the residential qualification for immigrants from 5 to 15 years to get on to the housing waiting list. Five Labour councillors supported this and were suspended, then finally expelled from the Labour Group. One went on to stand as an independent in 1968. In 1968 also the first Asian Labour councillor was elected in Southall.

What about the Southall Conservatives? They called for a stop to immigration into Southall, but were not as overtly racist as Peter Griffiths in Smethwick. Barbara Maddin, their candidate, said that immigration controls were regrettable but could be operated in a humane

way. They recruited an Asian council candidate Dr Rangat who was not elected to the council in 1968 but was made an alderman. He soon resigned however, disliking the rise of Enoch Powell supporters in their party. Most of the dirty work in Southall was done by the BNP, the Tories hoping to reap the rewards. In *Immigration and Race in British Politics (1965)*, Paul Foot argues that racism was a national strategy on the part of the Conservatives to break the allegiance of the industrial working class to Labour in the post war years, in the west Midlands and the London suburbs, where Labour election victories had led to the 1945 landslide.

So what could have happened and did not? Labour could have lost Southall in 1964. The Indian Working Association could have fielded its own candidates but did not. The community could have been irretrievably divided and a ghetto created. This did not happen although the problem of racism did not go away. The Southall Labour Party could have failed to hold the Party line and /or disintegrated.

None of the above happened. The 1964-1970 Labour Government passed the first legislation against race discrimination, in 1965 and 1968. It did not however repeal the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962.

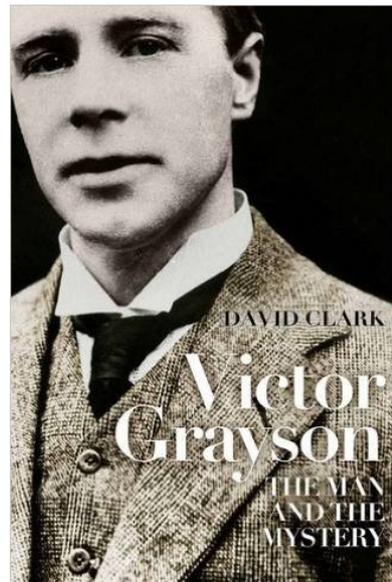
As unemployment increased in the 1970s there were further flashpoints in Southall politics.

This article was based on a paper given at the Political History Network, University of Reading, August 2016

Book Reviews

Victor Grayson : the Man and the Mystery, by David Clark, Quartet Books

Reviewed by Wayne David, MP



Victor Grayson was a beguiling and fascinating individual. In 1907 he was elected as Independent Labour Party candidate for Colne Valley, the seat for which his biographer David Clark, now a Labour peer, represented many years later.

Grayson was a tub-thumping individual but failed to knuckle down to parliamentary work. Having an ongoing problem with the demon drink, he fell out with the leaders of the Labour Party, and tried, unsuccessfully to set up his own political party.

Disillusioned with politics in Britain, Grayson travelled the US on a lecture tour. When the first World War broke out he went to the Western Front as a journalist, then to Australia and New Zealand to rally support for the British war effort.

On his return to Britain, Grayson considered a return to politics, flirting with the pro-war National Democratic Labour Party, but decided against this and instead, withdrew entirely from public life.

In September 1920 Grayson disappeared. Despite many reported sightings, his disappearance remains a mystery. David Clark's well researched and clearly written book describes and examines all aspects of Grayson's fascinating story. It's a subject Clark first examined in his 1985 book *Victor Grayson : Labour's Lost Leader*. This updated version is the result of Clark's continued sleuthing and includes new evidence which gives fresh insight into Grayson's intriguing life.

For instance Clark strongly suggests that Grayson's pro-War tours of the antipodes were financed and organised by the authorities. Also Clark suggests that Grayson's very comfortable lifestyle after the War, was in some way, connected to his dubious relationship with Maundy Gregory, known as Lloyd George's 'honours broker.' There is tantalising little that is specific, but the trail of circumstantial evidence suggests that Grayson's enjoyment of the 'finer things of life' was financed through the receipts of substantial government funds. For example the rent on his sumptuous flat in London was paid from an unknown source and that 'every two weeks a package was delivered' to Grayson's flat by two men in 'uniform or livery.'

This it is suggested may well be connected to Grayson's mysterious disappearance in late 1920. Clark describes how Grayson left his home, taking almost all his personal belongings because 'he had clearly prepared for a major change of lifestyle.' Clarkson therefore dismisses the suggestion that Grayson wandered off, suffering from memory loss or that he died from natural causes. He also rejects the idea that Grayson was murdered.

Clark is inclined to the view that 'Grayson decided for some reason, to change his identity and start a new life', and that in all probability, he did this, whilst remaining in England. If this was the case, he needed assistance and funding to do so. This is where the plot thickens and where speculation remains dominant.

Can it be that Grayson received his finance through blackmailing individuals he knew were engaged in homosexual activities? As someone with 'homosexual tendencies' himself, Grayson would have known the

secrets of many. Or was it the case that Grayson was involved with in some way, or had information to the sale of honours? It was known that Maundy Gregory was a homosexual and he and Victor Grayson knew each other.

There is also the intriguing possibility that Victor Grayson was of 'aristocratic blood', and that he may have had connections with the family of Winston Churchill. Fascinating as this possibility may be, there is little evidence to give it substance. But if Grayson did have these connections, it would explain why there has been such a marked reluctance by the Establishment to release information about Grayson's disappearance.

Although David Clark has taken us closer than anyone before to understanding what happened to Victor Grayson, this book does not finally solve the mystery of Grayson's strange disappearance. It is nevertheless an excellent biography which delves into the extraordinary life of one of the 20th century's most intriguing personalities. It is well worth reading.

This review was first published in the *House Magazine*, 28th October 2016.

Exhibition – We are the Lions



Grunwicks at 40 Exhibition is at Brent Museum, Willesden Library Centre, 95 High Road, Willesden, NW10 until 26th March.

Hours 9am – 8pm