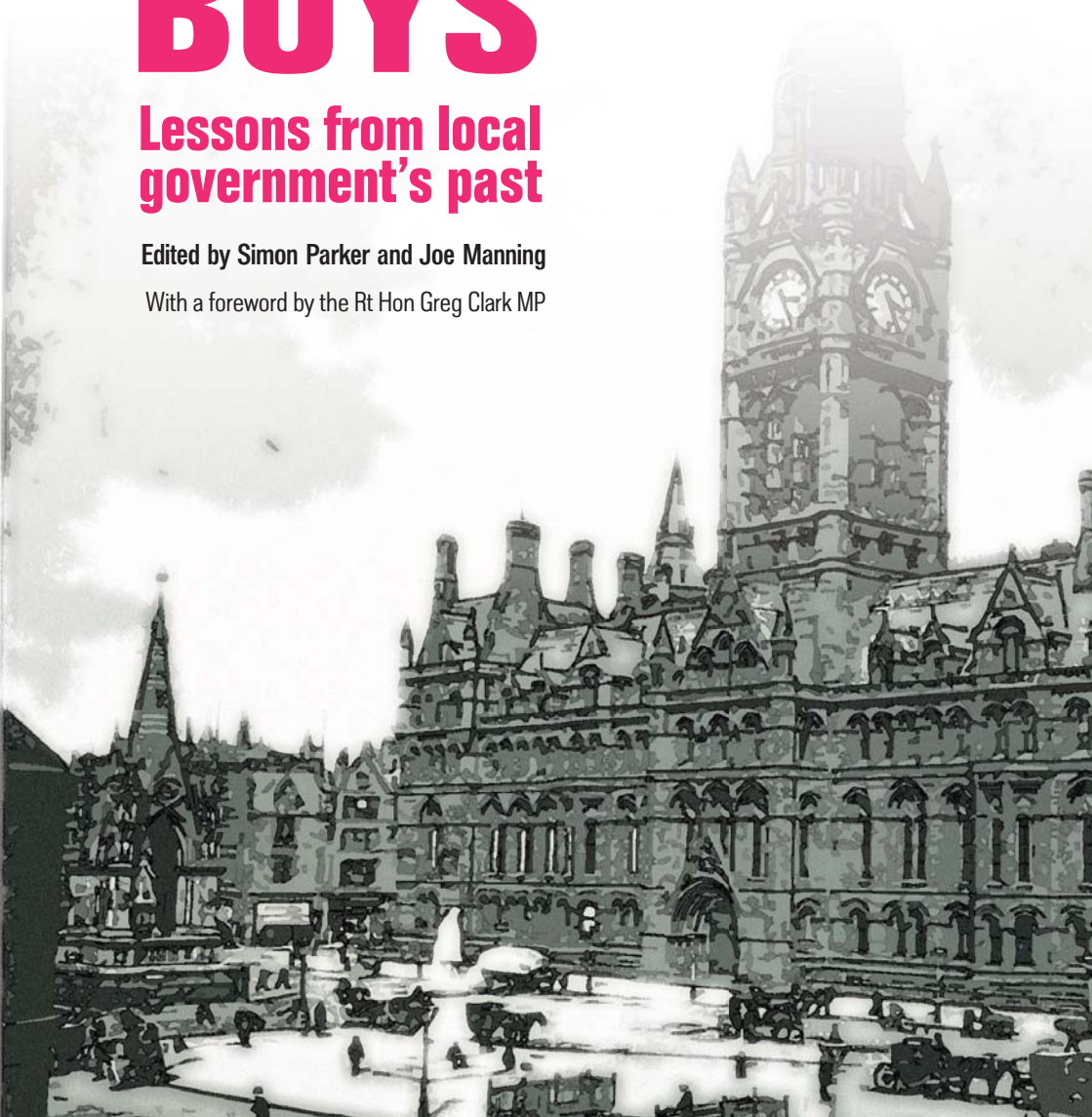


THE HISTORY BOYS

**Lessons from local
government's past**

Edited by Simon Parker and Joe Manning

With a foreword by the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP



New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

© NLGN July 2013

All rights reserved

Published by NLGN

Hub Westminster, 80 Haymarket

1st Floor, New Zealand House

London, SW1Y 4TE

Tel 020 7148 4601 . Email info@nlgn.org.uk . www.nlgn.org.uk

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP	
INTRODUCTION	5
Simon Parker and Joe Manning	
MAKING THE WEATHER: JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN'S VISION FOR BIRMINGHAM	9
Catherine Staite	
BUILDING BRIDGES: HERBERT MORRISON'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN LONDON	19
George W. Jones	
THE 'CHICAGO OF GREAT BRITAIN': GROWTH AND URBAN REGENERATION IN LIVERPOOL	29
Dr Charlotte Wildman	
A NEW JERUSALEM: HEALTH SERVICES IN BERMONDSEY	39
Sue Goss	
POSTSCRIPT: A LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE	46
Cllr Doug Taylor	
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	48

FOREWORD

The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP

Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Minister for Cities

It is sometimes said that a Councillor can do more to make a practical difference than a Member of Parliament. Having served in both capacities, I think there's a lot of truth in that. An MP can, of course, become a Minister – but, even then, there's a direct connection between politics and people that you only find in local government.

In central government one can make a decision that affects every school or library in the country, but in local government the decisions you make are about *specific* schools, about *specific* libraries. You don't just see the impact of what you decide on a page of statistics, but on the streets where you live and the faces of your neighbours.

I believe that this direct connection to the community is what inspired great local leaders like Joseph Chamberlain to achieve what they did. And it is why it is so important that we should remember not only their inspirational example, but also what happened next: how the powers of local democracy were usurped by Whitehall and Westminster.

Today, as we seek to turn the tide of centralisation, we need to learn all the lessons that history can teach us. That is why this collection of essays – brought together by the New Local Government Network – is so important.

Through the City Deals programme and other reforms, my hope is that we will lay the foundation for a second golden age of local government, but in the meantime I draw great encouragement from these tales of the first.

INTRODUCTION

Simon Parker and Joe Manning

NLGN

If we want to understand the future of local government, we must first understand its past. Because while technologies, demographics and social attitudes change, the fundamentals do not: Britain has faced recessions, poverty and budget deficits before, and for the last 150 years local government has done its best to meet these challenges.

If we want to know how councils will look with significantly less money, we can look back to the cash-strapped municipal corporations of the 19th century. If we want to learn about driving local economic growth, we should study the infrastructure projects cities undertook in the 1930s. And if we want to learn about community leadership, we could do much worse than turn to the civic visionaries of the past.

This collection brings together four essays on the history of local government. Bermondsey, Birmingham, Liverpool and London provide the stage and politicians from each of the major political parties take leading roles.

The period covered ranges from the 1870s to the 1930s. For many this was the heyday of local government; pre-dating the centralism demanded by the Second World War effort and subsequently entrenched by the welfare state. It was a period in which local authorities, in the words of the contemporary novelist Winifred Holtby, were seen as “the first line of defence thrown up by the community against our common enemies – poverty, sickness, isolation and social maladjustment”.

It is always dangerous to take the complex mass of history and extract simple messages for the present. But reading these essays, it is hard not to feel a sense of optimism. Leaders like Bermondsey’s Alfred Salter and Birmingham’s Joseph Chamberlain built extraordinary municipal edifices on the poorest and shakiest of foundations. If they could do it then, what could we achieve now?

As Catherine Staite writes in her essay on Chamberlain, popular politicians of the age were defined by their “vision and imaginative energy.” Their success was dependent upon channelling this energy to the points at which it would have the greatest impact. To this end, the essays cover specific policies for homes, education, jobs and public health. All are issues that continue to top the agendas of local leaders.

Glimpses of individual personality shine throughout the collection. We learn from George Jones that Herbert Morrison often slept in London’s County Hall, padding around the corridors in his pyjamas. Catherine Staite tells us that, despite their differing politics, Beatrice Webb couldn’t help but be enamoured with the charismatic and well-dressed Chamberlain.

Beyond policies and personalities, three common themes also emerge in the essays. They should be heeded by contemporary policy makers as they provide lessons that could help make the local government sector stronger for the future.

Firstly, this was a period of assertive but not autonomous local government. Local and central relations were critical to successful place-based policies. This point is made clear in Dr Charlotte Wildman’s essay on the construction of the Mersey tunnel and the leadership of the ‘King of Liverpool’ Archibald Salvidge. The Heseltine Review and City Deals signal a welcome return to such collaboration.

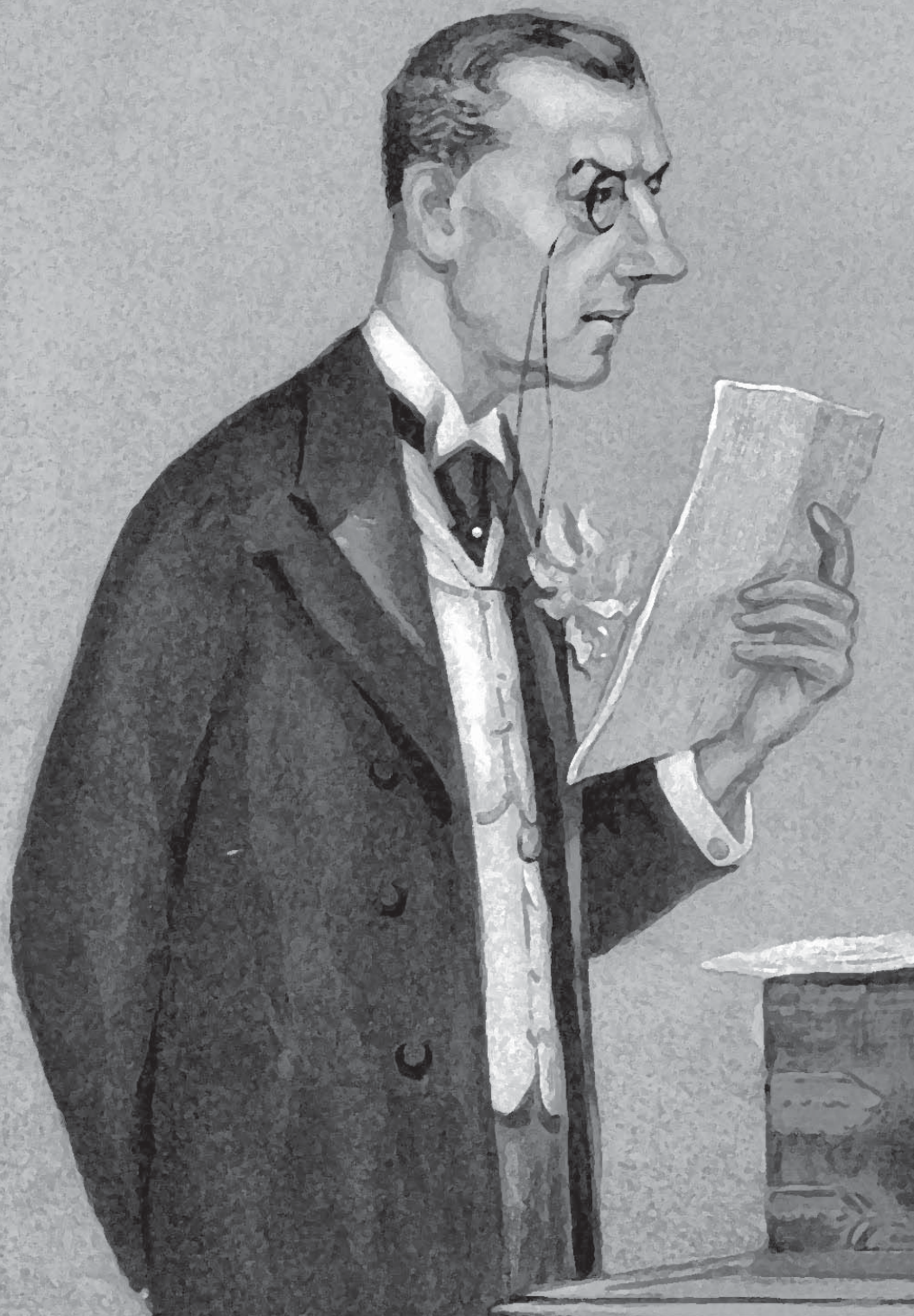
Secondly, throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, ambitious councils were engaged in a period of reconstructing and redesigning. Tunnels were dug, bridges built, homes constructed, power generated and universities founded. Today, when many local authorities are understandably concerned about what they are losing, it is important that we also continually look to what we should be building.

Thirdly, the best local ideas were infused with a sense of common purpose and civic pride. They catalysed new collaborations with the private and social sectors and were often progressive front runners of services that were later adopted nationally.

So Bermondsey Council, led by GP Dr Alfred Salter, created policies for health and wellbeing that foreshadowed the creation of the NHS. It was able to finance its radical schemes through higher rates of local taxation which were nearly unanimously supported by the electorate.

As many of today's local government leaders look to the horizon with trepidation, we hope these essays will serve to remind them that local government does not have to be defined as a collection of declining services. Throughout its history local government has found new ways to meet the needs of local people, and it can continue to do so through new approaches to service delivery, ambitious plans for economic growth and the development of whole new services in areas such as energy generation.

Sue Goss concludes her essay on Dr Salter by asking whether today's local government has forgotten how to dream. That is a challenge we hope today's local politicians will rise to with gusto.



MAKING THE WEATHER: JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN'S VISION FOR BIRMINGHAM

Catherine Staite

These are difficult times for local government, when political and managerial leaders battle with the daily frustrations which result from having a very wide range of responsibilities - often devolved by central government without the requisite funding - and a very narrow span of control. It is sometimes tempting to hark back to a happier age when local leaders did not feel both overwhelmed and powerless. For many, the symbol of that happier age is Joseph Chamberlain. He has become synonymous with a time when local politics was the place to be. He was someone who led, who had a vision and who delivered. He is seen as the epitome of a powerful, effective local leader – who really got things done. Yet, how much do we really know about him? Can his example guide us and help us overcome the challenges of our age?

Joseph Chamberlain was born in London in 1836, the son of a shop keeper, and educated at University College School. He moved to Birmingham, joined the Liberal Party and was elected as a town councillor in 1868. He rose to the position of Mayor in 1873. Perhaps the first thing he can teach local leaders is to start young and rise swiftly. At a time when the age profile of local councillors is so out of alignment with that of the people they serve, we have to ask ourselves, if he was alive today would Chamberlain be attracted to local government? Would he be able, at the age of 32, to rise so quickly through merit and personal drive, or would he be languishing as a backbencher waiting for the vacancy that never comes, being viewed by the incumbents as a young upstart and a serious threat, and consequently side-lined?

EARLY RADICALISM

Chamberlain made his fortune as a businessman in Birmingham but he was also a radical. Being radical in the mid to late 19th century required both intellectual and moral muscle. So much was wrong – slum housing, poverty, ignorance and disease – but many forces of state and church were determined to maintain such status quo. As the words of one hymn remind us - ‘The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate/ God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate’. To be radical in Chamberlain’s time was to be able to envisage and be willing to fight for the creation of an entirely different world, in which poverty and ignorance were not life sentences and infant mortality was not natural wastage. To be radical he needed to see the potential in people and reject the accepted wisdom of the time that the poor were ‘idle and profligate’ – as categorised by the workhouse administrators. So what might today’s leaders learn from Chamberlain? Perhaps, that independence of mind, a focus on the capacities as well as the needs of the most vulnerable and the ability to recognise potential for change are prerequisites for tackling our contemporary ‘wicked’ issues.

Chamberlain was driven by a desire to improve people’s lives by creating a better environment within which they could flourish. Most of today’s local leaders espouse similar ambition but eschew radicalism. Contemporary commentators suggest that left and right are battling for control of a narrow slice of middle ground. That might appear to create a political discourse characterised by reasonableness and moderation but perhaps it actually crowds out the space for new thinking, for challenging old ideas and doing things differently.

Having done his radical thinking, Chamberlain did indeed do things differently. He just *bought* the ingredients of success – gas companies, water supplies and land – until he had all the assets he needed to drive through change. What a dream for his successors – to be able to buy New Street Station and just make it work, rather than spending fifteen years stitching together the funding and permissions to improve a ghastly station and regenerate the heart of the city.

Today's local political leaders may think they have few levers to help them achieve the sort of change which Chamberlain envisaged. Their system of levers is more complex and subtle than Chamberlain's but it can still deliver the goods. Local leaders still have the distinction of democratic legitimacy, which empowers them to convene and moderate complex networks of national, regional, public and private players to deliver better outcomes. They need to exercise their leadership and diplomatic skills every time central government delegates to local government the responsibility for joining up at a local level the endeavours which it has failed to develop coherently at a national level.

Where we have duplication of effort, overlapping responsibilities, complexity and conundrums – such as in worklessness, infrastructure, and health and social care – local government needs to use all its diplomacy to create a common sense of purpose and support strong delivery partnerships. Without that leadership, local government cannot withstand the relentless drive of centralisation or defend local priorities against national policy imperatives. In spite of his direct power in Birmingham, Chamberlain understood the need, and demonstrated his ability, to build alliances to get things done. So perhaps many of today's local leaders should take comfort in their demonstrable ability to use indirect leadership to achieve better outcomes – against all the odds.

CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a very personal thing – drawing as it does on character and values, as well as on skills and knowledge. So what can current political leaders learn from Chamberlain's character? He was resilient. He didn't win every battle but he continued fighting till he had done all he could. He fought on issues of principle, for example, opposing local authority funding of church schools from 1874 until the Education Act of 1902, because he thought education should be secular. He fought ignorance and vested interests – including attacking the hereditary powers of the House of Lords. He might be rather disappointed that we have not entirely cracked that one yet, but he would expect national leaders to apply the core principles he espoused, of

democracy and equality, and to keep going until they got things right. Both local and national leaders now seem to have very big 'too difficult' boxes and whole fields of long grass in which to dispose of issues that call for resilience and consistency.

The way in which leaders treat those around them is also a key element of their leadership style. We recognise the phenomenon of the 'charming psychopath' – the person who gains support and achieves positions of power by using their followers and then discarding them when they have outlived their usefulness. Chamberlain demonstrated that it was possible both to be a strong leader and to genuinely value those around him.

Judging by the impact he had on Beatrice Webb, he clearly had a great deal of charm and charisma which affected even those who did not share his political beliefs. As she recorded later, "In 1882 came the catastrophe of my life. At a London dinner-party I met Joseph Chamberlain. I was ripe for love, revelling in newly acquired health and freedom, my intelligence wide awake, my heart unclaimed. He had energy and personal magnetism. But my intellect not only remained free but positively hostile to his influence". Perhaps the lesson for today's leaders is that a combination of personal and positional power can have surprising effects on the people they meet, and they should always be both self-aware and careful not to abuse that power. Beatrice loved Joseph in spite of his politics and that should be a great comfort to many of today's leaders.

LISTENING AND COLLABORATING

Throughout his life, those he met basked in the warmth of Joseph Chamberlain's personality. He does seem to have had a very nice way about him. As one of his contemporaries commented, "He expresses his opinions very decidedly, which is an advantage as it clears the way and you know how to proceed: but his advice is most valuable and tendered in an extremely pleasant way, he listens to each suggestion and weighs each proposition most thoroughly". The bit about listening is as relevant and possibly as remarkable today as it was in Chamberlain's time. Too many leaders fall into the trap of believing that power confers permission to be rude. They demonstrate contempt for those who disagree with them or whose position

is less lofty than theirs. This doesn't enhance their power or effectiveness; it only creates a terrible atmosphere and guarantees that people won't tell them the things they really need to hear, for fear of the consequences. The fall of local and national political leaders often has a certain tragic inevitability – they get too big for their boots, they stop listening, people stop telling them things, they think they are cleverer than they are and bang – they are history. Leaders who want to have long careers need to be courteous and good listeners like Chamberlain.

Pictures of Chamberlain throughout his political life show that he was something of a natty dresser, with his distinctive monocle and an orchid buttonhole. This is perhaps not a look which works today, but a good example of how leaders can project their personality. It is interesting to observe the sartorial style of male local leaders. In some councils the blazer is ubiquitous for men and in others a grey suit, perhaps enlivened by a slightly brighter tie, is the accepted style. The message conveyed is one of conformity and an absence of any personal style. In today's highly critical climate it is a brave leader – man or woman - who actually expresses their true personality through their appearance but perhaps, if they could be just a little less monochrome and a little more individual, local politics might be a bit more interesting.

However great his charm and whatever his virtues, Chamberlain did not enjoy universal acclaim and he wasn't loved by all who knew him. Particularly not by Conservatives who called him at various times a "monopoliser" and "dictator" as well as accusing him of republicanism and atheism, and even stooping to tactics such as throwing dead cats at him during the general election of 1874. He seems to have taken personal attacks, both verbal and physical, in his stride and not to have paid them too much attention. He had a cool nerve, being described as "unmoved" during a fist fight which broke out near him in the House of Commons when he was an MP. However, the real lesson he bequeaths us is that he wasn't deterred by opposition. He didn't fall into the trap of some modern conviction politicians of mistaking stubbornness and megalomania for leadership. Rather he turned opposition to his advantage, remarking that he owed the progress of his radical agenda "entirely to my former opponents and all the opposition has come from my former friends". In the current

political landscape, at both local and national level, the ability to collaborate, to find common ground and to build consensus is becoming increasingly vital to success.

“SPARKLING, INSURGENT, COMPULSIVE”

Although Joseph Chamberlain is remembered and revered by local government as ‘one of us’, he also made a success of a national and even an international political career. It is a measure of his local popularity in Birmingham that in 1876 he was elected to Parliament, unopposed. His experiences on the national and international stages also provide useful lessons for 21st century leaders. Many of his ambitions, as President of the Board of Trade, a role to which he was appointed by Gladstone in 1880 and later as Colonial Secretary, were thwarted by the collapse of fragile political alliances, demonstrating that even the best leaders can be the victim of circumstances beyond their control. However, he was still hugely influential. The young Winston Churchill described him as someone who “made the weather” and as “incomparably the most live, sparkling, insurgent, compulsive figure in British politics”. Even as he made a success of his career in Parliament he maintained an interest in local government. While President of the Board of Trade he continued to work for the greater good of local authorities, for example, through the introduction of the Electric Lighting Bill. One of the key lessons of his career for both local and national leaders of today is that local leaders can make a national impact and the ‘them and us’ divide which currently exists is both artificial and unnecessary.

Chamberlain is often thought of primarily as a builder. He built both municipal confidence and infrastructure. As a result, his achievements were certainly visible and notable - he is famous for having “parked, assized, marketed, gas and watered and *improved*” Birmingham. He demonstrated the importance of delivering things which people can see and appreciate and which have a direct beneficial impact on their quality of life. Even at a time when most local leaders cannot easily embark on exciting new capital developments, they can still pay close attention to the quality, cleanliness and comfort of the built environment, to enhance the wellbeing of their residents.

SCHOOL OF UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTION

Chamberlain demonstrated a key leadership skill, which is very relevant today, of being able to focus on more than one thing at a time. As he embarked on the Herculean task of transforming Birmingham, he was also fighting for a cause which may well have been even more important to him – education. He was a self-made man, who didn't go to university but he campaigned from 1867 to 1902 for universal education, free from Church control. He recognised that education was the key to the sustainable improvement of the lives of the people of Birmingham and invested not only in schools but art galleries and museums, which demonstrated his commitment to education in its widest sense.

Today's leaders may question the extent to which, in a time of great financial stringency, it is the responsibility of the public sector to provide access to the arts and culture. However, over 150 years later, Chamberlain's museums and art galleries, themselves beautiful buildings which have stood the test of time, not only provide access to beauty and knowledge for the residents of the Birmingham, but also attract visitors who spend money in the city and enhance the reputation of Birmingham as a global city. Sometimes, leaders have to think big and take the long view.

Joseph Chamberlain is closely associated with the founding of the University of Birmingham. In the words of a contemporary, "the conception was his and no man did more to bring it to reality". He maintained a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve and he inspired and mobilised other key players to help achieve that goal. His definition of a University was a "school of universal instruction, not confined to any particular branch of knowledge but taking all knowledge in its province. A place in which those who come to teach shall continue to learn and in which the work, the most important work of original research, shall be continuously carried on under favourable circumstances." That definition reflects the drive and ambition of the University of Birmingham to this day.

COMMERCIAL ACUMEN

In the 19th century, trade and industry took place a long way from education. However Chamberlain thought that to place a university in the middle of “a great industrial and manufacturing population is to do something to leaven the whole mass with higher aims and higher intellectual ambitions...” He also argued for the importance of the distinctive application of knowledge to science and commerce, to create a strong symbiotic relationship between industry and learning. Chamberlain demonstrated the importance he placed on the founding of the University of Birmingham when he said, “I believe no greater project has ever been proposed to a city”. The University was perhaps more important to him, the self-made man, than all the other things he had built. Indeed, he was opposed to spending the money he helped raise to found the university on grand buildings - he thought it would be better spent on recruiting the best academics. While some of his municipal colleagues expected the university to be an extension of the Council and subject to similar control, he fought for the academic independence of the self-governing university.

Chamberlain demonstrated his political and commercial acumen in the way he helped to raise money to fund the university. He focused on broadening the base of financial support to include the middle classes, not just a small number of wealthy benefactors. This was one way of creating a wide sense of ownership of, and pride in, the University by the people of the city of Birmingham. His notable contribution was to galvanise action and help to achieve in two years what had been talked about and hoped for during the previous 50 years. That too is a useful lesson for local leaders. Put your energy where it will have the greatest impact.

Chamberlain showed that a leader can be principled, focused and resilient without closing his or her mind to new ideas. Much knowledge is available, in many fields, to support today's leaders as they develop policy and take difficult decisions - in history, geography, economics, sociology, criminology, public management, statistics and psychology, to name but a few.

Joseph Chamberlain's successors at Birmingham City Council demonstrate their belief in the value of working closely with academics, through their close

relationships with all of Birmingham's universities. The strong relationship with the University of Birmingham, their own civic university, is being developed today through a long standing relationship with INLOGOV and through the development of a Public Services Academy which makes critical thinking, knowledge transfer and academic rigour easily available to both politicians and officers. In this way they are following Chamberlain's example and demonstrating that leadership is enhanced by learning.



BUILDING BRIDGES: HERBERT MORRISON'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN LONDON

George W. Jones

Herbert Morrison is often regarded as one of the most successful leaders of a British local authority in the 20th century. Morrison was Leader of the London County Council (LCC) from 1934 to 1940. He was the master-mind of the Labour Party's victory in the election of 1934 that brought Labour to power at County Hall for the first time, ousting the Municipal Reformers (Conservatives) who had been in charge since 1907. His leadership of the LCC brought Labour an increased majority in 1937, and he would probably have won again in 1940, had the War not postponed elections and catapulted him into the Coalition National Government as a minister. He passed the chief test of a democratic leader – winning elections.

During Herbert Morrison's leadership the LCC covered 117 square miles, a population of 4.5 million, and a budget of £40m a year. The Council had 144 members (124 councillors elected by citizens and 20 aldermen elected by councillors), 20 major committees, 14 departments and 78,000 staff. It was the largest local authority in the UK. People came from all over the world to see LCC hospitals, schools, houses, architecture, parks and swimming pools, and how to govern a huge metropolitan area.

MUNICIPAL IMPROVEMENT

Morrison had a strategy whose key themes were improvement of services, administrative efficiency and financial control. He sought to build a coalition of consumers and ratepayers to remove from London's governance the "Dead Hand of Toryism". He took care not to be dominated by trade unions and adhered to constitutional processes, avoiding direct action. He respected the law, following its provisions, but he did not see the LCC as just an agent to implement central government's policies.

His vision of local government was that it was the government of London, and for London. He stood up to central government, winning his greatest battle against it over the destruction of Sir John Rennie's clapped-out Waterloo Bridge of 1816, and building a splendid new one which should rightly have been named Morrison Bridge. There is no evidence he ever said "Bigger central government", but as with the other saying often attributed to him of "We'll build the Tories out of London", he could well have said it. No one has yet won the prize I offered long ago to find an authoritative source for him saying or writing such memorable words.

In his first year of office he announced each month a batch of decisions. He speedily drew up three-year programmes for the major functions of housing, town planning, health, education and parks. He contrasted his rule with that of the Municipal Reformers who had talked for years about Waterloo Bridge: Labour began demolition in ten weeks. A green belt had been discussed for ten years: Labour produced a scheme within one.

Morrison's top priority was housing; clearing slums, improving standards in LCC properties, and building new estates, sometimes in marginal Tory strongholds. But Morrison was not irresponsible with public money. In handling public assistance he argued the LCC had a right to know if an individual really needed help and assistance was not fixed higher than could be earned by a man at work.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Although 80 years later, times have changed and the context in which local government operates is vastly different, there are still lessons to be learned from how Morrison did it. An emphasis on leadership is now back in fashion as a key factor in determining whether a local authority's performance is successful, and Morrison's way of running a local authority can provide lessons for local government leaders today.

Although he was not a directly-elected mayor, he was known throughout London as its Leader, Mr London. But he did not rule as an autocrat. He worked through what he called the Presidium, consisting of the three key chairmen of committees, Charles Latham of Finance, Lewis Silkin of Housing,

and Isaac Hayward of Public Assistance and with Chief Whip as his eyes, ears and strong arm. Morrison's style was collegial, ensuring that before strategies, policies and decisions were set there had been wide consultation and full discussion among his leading colleagues, and then they and their committees were left alone to carry out the policies.

As Leader, Morrison could attend meetings of any committee. The only ones he attended regularly were Finance and General Purposes, from where he could see what the others were up to. The only service committee he went to frequently was Town Planning when it was setting up the Green Belt. He did not chair any committee himself until the end of the 30s; when with war looming, he chaired the Air Raid Precautions (Civil Defence) Committee.

The full Council met every Tuesday at 2.30 pm, the day after the Policy Committee of chairmen had considered all new policy proposals. Then one hour before the Council met, the Party Group meeting of councillors gathered. This preparation enabled the business to sail through the full Council. It was not steam-rolled through. Before these formal processes had occurred Morrison had met his informal Presidium – he had no Deputy. They would argue out issues and present a united front. They could meet anywhere at any time, a huddle in a corridor or by phone. They trusted each other. They would include other chairmen if a controversial issue arose, like George Strauss from the Highways Committee over Waterloo Bridge.

Morrison created a leadership team. Latham, an accountant, was an iron Chancellor who believed in tight control of expenditure and of the rate level. Labour had been seared by accusations of extravagance and financial irresponsibility that had brought down the MacDonald government in 1931. Latham and Morrison saw eye-to-eye on the need for stable rates. After all, said Morrison, the poor and council tenants paid rates too. Hayward, an official from the Transport and General Workers Union, was Morrison's eyes on the councillors, always feeling the pulse of the party and alerting him to potential difficulties ahead. He was his trouble-shooter, handling difficult assignments, like ensuring that welfare benefits from the Public Assistance Committee were humane but not extravagant. Silkin, a lawyer, was in charge of Housing, which Morrison saw as his election-winner.

Morrison said he did not rely on the electoral system to produce the able people the Council needed. He sought out and recruited able working-class and professional middle-class people, businessmen and women. He would find out if they were Labour sympathisers, bring them in, find them a seat and get them adopted. Some he would place on the bench of aldermen. He was keen to inject women into the LCC, appointing for the first time women to the Fire Brigade Committee, the Metropolitan Water Board, and as the chair of the Establishment Committee (Human Resources).

Morrison encouraged his councillors, suggesting what they should specialise in, persuading them to speak, and reassuring them as a good mentor should. He did not like them to be councillors in their metropolitan boroughs since he felt they would put the borough first and not think of London as a whole. He built a team to lead the LCC. His officers felt the quality of Morrison's members was far higher than in the provincial local authorities where they had previously served. His patronage was not personal: he talked his appointments over with the Presidium and then took them to a meeting of the full Group. He was never defeated there.

Morrison was accessible for consultation by the chairmen. Here he was in his element, bubbling with ideas, chatting away about new ideas, plans for new expenditure, anything likely to cause controversy and incite trouble from the opposition, or from his own side. He treated his leadership team with respect, which was reciprocated, and they said they always felt better after a talk with Herbert. He led with a light touch. His leadership was unchallenged.

Morrison did give a lead – he was not indecisive – he said, “I never boil my cabbage twice”. In the chair he was brisk and racy, not a time waster. But his style was not to impose. He coaxed and wooed, with an arm over the shoulder and cheery banter. He was never such an intervening leader as his successors Latham and Hayward. Their methods gave rise to Attlee's remark that the LCC was “The nearest thing to a totalitarian state in Britain”, but Morrison's approach was collective leadership not personal dictatorship.

POWER AND SUPPORT

Morrison's power base was the London Labour Party (LLP), which he had created and shaped since he was appointed its secretary in 1915. Its Executive Committee was composed of his closest colleagues, pretty much the same people as on his LCC Policy Committee. He kept close to the representatives of the trade unions which provided most of the party's funding and most votes at party conference, above all the Transport and General Workers Union, whose deputy secretary, Isaac Hayward, was the LLP's Treasurer. He relied heavily on the Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society based in his LCC constituency at Woolwich.

Morrison was proud his local party had the largest individual membership of any in the country, and a thriving women's section. With such dependable support his line was usually accepted by the LLP's Conference and Executive, which enabled him to produce policies to attract voters and to run candidates for elections who were not from the looney-left of the East End proclaiming Poplarity and linking up with Communists. He regarded the party as more the organisation for winning elections rather than to make policy.

Morrison spent most of his time at County Hall, leaving the routine running of the London Labour Party to his trusted Deputy Secretary, Donald Daines. He often slept at County Hall in his office on a camp bed tucked behind a screen and he padded around the corridors in his pyjamas.

The Opposition respected him, praising his integrity and honesty, and for his performances in the full Council, where he ran rings around them. He dominated the Council with his humour, repartee and agility. A common tactic was to put up speakers to express extreme views at the start of a debate and he would conclude with a speech of reasonableness. He teased the Opposition that they were doing such a bad job of opposing him that he was ready to come over and advise them how to draft their amendments. He characterised them as "Mr Dilly, Mr Dally and Mr Can't", whose slogan was "Something Saved and Nothing Done."

“SHOW ME HOW I CAN”

A key aspect that made Morrison's leadership successful was his relationship with his chief officers. He was a master at handling officials. He forged a collaborative partnership with them. He wanted them to give him and his chairmen their advice based on their professional experience and expertise. He did not want them to venture into political advice – he and his party colleagues would provide that. He told his members, “Always listen to the officials before you decide anything.”

Morrison was especially close to his chief officer, the Clerk, George Gater. He was at the apex of the full-time staff just as Morrison was at the apex of the politicians. He regarded Morrison as a superb political leader who knew how to relate to officers. Officials assessed him as the best professional politician they had ever served. He knew the facts, was quick to see the key points. They could go to him with new ideas and plans. He expected them to put to him the pros and cons of any issue and give him a definite recommendation. He would argue with them, provoke discussion, and then he would decide.

Morrison, from the start, sought to shape the culture of the bureaucracy at County Hall by telling his legal officers: “I don't want to know why I can't do this, show me how I can.” The Clerk and his staff provided a secretariat for all committees, acting as Morrison's intelligence service. They remarked on the huge amount of reading he did, and with only one eye. He poured over officials' memoranda to committees, committee reports, even in proof, and committee agendas, so that he could hold up some matters for further consideration before policy had hardened. He watched the press and his post-bag for complaints and expected his party staff to bring him their concerns, and he would call in officials to deal with them. He enjoyed seminar sessions where chief officers and chairmen would discuss tricky issues, with himself acting as a catalyst.

Morrison was a stickler for proper behaviour by members and officers. To prevent Labour's reputation being tarnished by accusations of improper influence by members in appointments and promotions of staff, he warned members to avoid familiarity and fraternisation with officers. They should not become indebted to them, nor to contractors and potential contractors of the

LCC, with whom they should stay beyond arm's length. He recognized that Labour members were the targets for seduction by businesses, with offers of drinks, meals, holidays and gifts, which could prove attractive particularly to members with little wealth of their own. He laid down in codes what they should not do. He did not rely on external bodies to enforce discipline on members: that was for the Chief Whip. Such matters were best settled internally.

MR LONDON

Morrison was at his most innovative in his attitude to publicity, both for the LCC and himself. He courted the press, creating a full-time department for press relations, moving the reporters from the distant gallery of the Council chamber, where the acoustics were bad, to the floor, making himself accessible to them and using them to break a story. He gave the press quotable items they could use without revision. He urged his chief officers to tailor their reports to what the press required.

Morrison was eager to publicise the LCC and its services, holding exhibitions, putting up posters, floodlighting County Hall and commissioning a history of the LCC. He used the most modern methods of publicity to identify himself in the public mind with what the LCC was doing. He used an outside unofficial group of young advertising experts, public-relations specialists, and journalists to advise him, devising snappy slogans for elections; making him and the LCC synonymous. Press photos showed him starting demolition work on Waterloo Bridge and at County Hall on the top of a fire-brigade ladder.

The climax of his publicity work came with the election of 1937. The message from his advisers was to personalise the Labour Party in Morrison. Posters gave him prominence. One vivid image was of a dialogue between two Tories, who concluded he'd done a good job. "I'm fair-minded. I'll give them a chance to finish it."

When his victory of 1937 was announced, he said "I believe we can rule London for ever. So when you meet the man who says it can't be done, pat him on the back, give him a cheery smile, and say Gertcher." He had made the LCC a paragon of responsible active government.

What can today's leaders in local government learn from Morrison?

- Devise a strategy with clear policy objectives;
- Focus on policies for matters that concern and worry citizens, building an alliance of council-tax payers and consumers of services;
- Remember the poor pay council tax;
- Work in a collegial style with a cabinet of colleagues;
- Recruit talented people to council positions;
- Use your party as the organisation to win elections rather than to make policy;
- Ensure that Council Meetings attract public attention as the place to debate the big issues facing the locality;
- Do not limit Councillors to scrutiny but find ways to involve them in policy-making;
- As the Leader work closely with the Chief Executive, you as the specialist in politics and them as the specialist in administration – this relationship is now recognised as the critical factor in whether a local authority is regarded as high-performing;
- Collaborate with the chief officers, relying on their professional expertise;
- Depend on the Chief Whip, not outsiders, to maintain proper behaviour by Councillors;
- Make presentation an essential element in policy-making;
- Treat the media as allies not enemies;
- Use sympathetic unofficial aides, for tasks officials would find improper to perform;

- Take the initiative and do not wait for central government to tell you what to do;
- Work within the law but exploit every aspect of it;
- Do not try to act like a private firm or bribe businesses, hoping to increase economic growth, but make your area a place where businesses will be eager to do business and invest;
- Concentrate on creating a place where your senior staff will be proud to live and work, bring up their families and educate their children.



THE 'CHICAGO OF GREAT BRITAIN': GROWTH AND URBAN REGENERATION IN LIVERPOOL

Dr Charlotte Wildman

The slumber lasted a while too long. But enterprise and better times have come to the rescue. The scene is changed. Go and look at it... It deserves and demands no less.¹

Liverpool's experience between the two World Wars is strongly associated with urban decay, a declining local economy and acute levels of unemployment and poverty.² Yet, this was not the full story. A strong and ambitious local government, led by the Conservative Party under the Chairmanship of the 'King of Liverpool', Sir Archibald Salvidge, responded to economic and political instability by investing in ambitious programmes of urban regeneration. In doing so, their vision and innovation revitalised local culture and ensured Liverpool not only survived but thrived during the most severe economic depression Britain has ever seen.

Britain's northern industrial towns and cities, once the great success stories of the industrial revolution, were particularly ill-affected by the economic problems of the interwar period: whereas London's official unemployment rate stood at 12% in 1932, the peak of the economic depression, it reached nearly 27% in the North-West and approached 30% in the North-East.³ As the old, staple industries such as coal, steel, cotton and shipbuilding collapsed dramatically in the industrial heartlands, the new light industries, such as the factories manufacturing consumer durables like radios and washing machines, emerged

¹ *Liverpoolian*, January 1938, p.17.

² Sam Davies, Pete Gill, Linda Grant, Martin Nightingale, Ron Noon, Andy Shallice, *Genuinely seeking work: mass unemployment on Merseyside in the 1930s* (Birkenhead, 1992).

³ Tim Hatton, 'Unemployment and the Labour Market in Inter-War Britain', Roderick Floud and Dierdre McCloskey (eds.), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700. Volume 2: 1860 – 1939*, (Cambridge, 1994), p.374.

in the South-East and the Midlands.⁴ Northern England's landscape became strongly associated with poverty and decay: when the documentary filmmaker, Paul Rotha, visited Lancashire during the 1930s he wrote, 'you could see the scarred mess that greedy men have made of this handsome country.'⁵

“FAITH IN THE FUTURE”

The situation in Liverpool was particularly dire as its port trade struggled in the difficult economic climate. Liverpool's share of national imports fell significantly across the period: from 33% in 1915-20, to just 20% for the period 1924-38.⁶ Just as damaging were the losses in passenger trade. The more lucrative north Atlantic trade shifted towards the newer ports, especially Southampton, where several shipping companies, most notably Cunard, moved their headquarters and caused significant white collar unemployment in Liverpool.⁷

The decline of its port accounts for Liverpool's particularly high unemployment rate of 33% in 1932, including half of the city's 35,000 dock workers.⁸ Rates were likely much higher than official figures suggest, as many dock workers were affected by under-employment due to the ad hoc nature of work.⁹ It is no surprise that Liverpool suffered from particularly high levels of poverty as a result of the city's economic problems: in 1932, 700 people per 10,000 claimed poor relief, in comparison to just 297 per 10,000 nationally.¹⁰ The scale of urban poverty is noted in Helena Forrester's autobiographical novel, which charts her family's arrival to Liverpool in 1930 to search for work. Forrester described 'men in

⁴ See John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics, 1929 – 39*, (London, 1994)

⁵ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Diary: An informal history of the British documentary film, 1928-1939*, (London, 1973), 103. Rotha was one of many left-wing intellectuals, the most famous being George Orwell, who flocked to the north-west to chart its high levels of poverty following industrial collapse. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, (London, 1989). See also the work of Mass Observation, established by Charles Madge, poet and journalist, Humphrey Jennings, poet and documentary filmmaker, and Tom Harrison, ornithologist and anthropologist. Mass Observation conducted an extensive research project in Bolton and possessed similar motivations to Orwell and Rotha. Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory*, (Hampshire, 2006).

⁶ H.G. Gentleman 'Merseyside and Its Region', in Richard Lawton and Catherine M. Cunningham (eds.), *Merseyside: Social and Economic Studies*, (London, 1970), pp.47-8.

⁷ Dudley Baines, 'Merseyside in the British economy: the 1930s and the Second World War', in Lawton and Cunningham (eds.), *Merseyside: Social and Economic Studies*, p.62.

⁸ Sam Davies *et al*, *Genuinely seeking work*, p. 13.

⁹ During the 1920s, most fully employed dock workers could only expect the equivalent of three and a half days earnings each week. Baines, 'Merseyside in the British economy', p.63.

¹⁰ *Liverpolitan*, July 1932, p.1 and p.19.

shabby caps (who) shuffled from litter-bin to litter-bin to sift through the garbage for food and cigarettes.¹¹

Yet, this miserable picture of Liverpool was at odds with how local politicians and urban planners saw the city. In June 1931, just as the city was facing the worst of its economic problems, Liverpool's Lord Mayor, Edwin Thompson, described what he perceived as a communal sense of optimism within the city. "Evidence of this faith in the future meets us at every hand on both sides of the river," he declared:

It is to be read in the fine architecture of the Cathedral and of those new palaces of commerce and amusement which have added so much to the dignity of the streets; in the vast development of our suburbs; in the contemplated attacks on our slum areas; in our new arterial roads and town and regional planning schemes.¹²

Thompson was describing the results of the innovative approach employed towards Liverpool's economic problems by the Corporation (local council) in conjunction with urban planners and the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture: they invested in ambitious programmes of urban transformation, including new housing; comprehensive transport systems; and new forms of architecture. Urban transformation was heavily publicised to local citizens through publicity materials and through civic celebrations. Not only was Liverpool's urban environment transformed, but local culture was revitalized and the local council was able to inspire a strong sense of confidence, optimism and loyalty amongst the local electorate, which would have been unthinkable at the start of the post-World War One period.

MASS SUFFRAGE

Liverpool's transition to peace following the First World War was extremely tumultuous and local politicians would have been right to have been concerned about their precarious grip on the city. Although many port towns and cities witnessed waves of racially-motivated violence in the Spring of 1919, known as the 'Race Riots', which were a response by returning soldiers to the presence

¹¹ Helen Forrester, *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*, (Jonathan Cape: London, 1974), p.15.

¹² Edwin Thompson, 'Merseyside and its Industrial Potentialities', *Liverpool Daily Post* Supplement 'The Ambassador of Merseyside's Industry and Commerce', 1 June 1931, p.1.

of foreign sailors, Liverpool saw the most violent clashes: a young black sailor, Charles Whootton, died after he was chased through the city by a lynch-mob and was either pushed or jumped into the docks followed by a baying crowd.¹³ In the same year, Liverpool experienced the highest proportion of strike action in the Police Strike of 1919, with five times as many policemen striking in comparison to London.¹⁴ The strikes led to considerable unrest throughout the city and 'resulted in wholesale destruction of property, much looting and the eventual repayment via the public taxes.'¹⁵

Especially worrying for local politicians in Liverpool was the advent of mass suffrage: Britain had a cross-class electorate for the first time and, as the rest of Europe and Russia saw the rise of political extremism, both national and local politicians took important steps to engage and communicate with the new electorate.¹⁶ The most successful political party to do this were the Conservatives, especially under the leadership of Stanley Baldwin whose inclusive rhetoric of "Englishness" and cosy approach to political broadcasting enabled him to engage effectively with voters across class lines.¹⁷

Liverpool is usually associated with an exceptional local political culture, often attributed to the impact of religion on local politics.¹⁸ Yet here too the Conservative Party dominated, although they faced significant competition from the Labour Party, largely mirroring national trends: In the early 1920s, around 90 council members in Liverpool were Conservatives, 25 each of Liberals and Independents, and around 6 members were of the Labour Party. By the mid-1930s, there was a greater proportion of Labour council members and in 1936 there were 78 Conservatives, 14 Liberals, 7 Independents, 12 Protestants, and 53 Labour.

¹³ Michael Rowe, 'Sex, "Race" and Riot in Liverpool, 1919', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 19 (2000), pp. 53-70, at p. 55.

¹⁴ Ron Bean, 'Police Unrest, Unionization and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool', *Journal of Contemporary History* 15 (1980), pp. 633 – 53.

¹⁵ Pat O'Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy*, (London, 1934), p.134.

¹⁶ Duncan Tanner, 'Electing the governors/the governance of the elect', Keith Robbins, *Short Oxford History of the British Isles, 1901 – 1951*, (Oxford, 2002), p.50.

¹⁷ Sian Nicholas, 'The Construction of National Identity: Stanley Baldwin, "Englishness" and the Mass Media in Inter-War Britain', Ina Zweiniger – Bargielowska and Martin Francis (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), pp.127-46.

¹⁸ P.J. Waller, *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool, 1868 – 1939* (Liverpool, 1981), p. 325; John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: the history of the Liverpool Irish, 1800 – 1939* (Liverpool, 2007), p. 297.

THE KING OF LIVERPOOL

The pioneering work of the national Conservative Party in communicating and engaging with a cross-class electorate at a time of great economic and political turbulence was undertaken on a local level in Liverpool by the innovative work of Sir Archibald Salvidge. As Chairman of the Conservative party in Liverpool from 1892 until his death in 1928, Salvidge displayed a civic loyalty and commitment to civic pride more closely associated with the mid 19th century, which is oft-cited as the peak of local government and civic culture.¹⁹ Salvidge had kept a close eye on working-class political culture through his Chairmanship of the Working Men's Conservative Association and he was renowned for 'mucking in'.²⁰ Known as the 'King of Liverpool', Salvidge embraced a more inclusive approach towards local politics in response to Labour's first parliamentary seat in Liverpool in 1923.²¹ For Salvidge, the only way to face the threat from Labour was to take a more active role in local civic culture and to focus on economic regeneration. Salvidge's populist approach was to prove fundamental in Liverpool's interwar urban regeneration.

Perhaps Salvidge's greatest achievement, and the most symbolic of his investment in Liverpool's regeneration, was the Mersey Tunnel. Much of Liverpool's economic problems lay in its over-reliance on its port trade and so it was hoped that an underground tunnel connecting Liverpool with Birkenhead, and therefore with the Wirral peninsular and north Wales, would encourage greater port traffic and ensure its 'integration in the industrial heartland of the nation'²². Designed by City Engineer, John Brodie, the tunnel was inspired by the Holland Tunnel, which connects New Jersey and Manhattan under the Hudson River, begun in 1920 and completed in 1927. Salvidge was awarded the Freedom of Liverpool for his success in obtaining 50% funding from central government for the Tunnel with the passing of the Mersey Tunnel Act in 1925.²³

¹⁹ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: ritual and authority and the English industrial city, 1840 – 1914*, (Manchester, 2000).

²⁰ Philip Waller, 'Salvidge, Sir Archibald Tutton James (1863–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35921>, accessed 10 April 2013]

²¹ Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, pp. 290–7.

²² John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.36.

²³ Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool: Behind the Political Scene, 1890 – 1928* (London, 1934), p. 283

The Tunnel project was not without problems however and cost 26% more than original estimates allowed, and a further £1,369,044 had to be borrowed from the Ministry of Health.²⁴ Sadly, Salvidge never lived to see the completion of the tunnel, dying in 1928.

Just as important as the potential benefits to the city's economy was the statement that such a grandiose project would make about Liverpool to the rest of the country. For example, the Tunnel was described proudly by its chairman as "a mighty piece of engineering, the tunnel will rank as one of the wonders of the world, as well as a monument to the civic enterprise of the city of Liverpool and the borough of Birkenhead".²⁵ The tunnel was formally opened by King George V on 18 July 1934, amid great pomp and ceremony and a 'Royal Tunnel Week', which was covered heavily in the press. The Lord Mayor was also present, alongside other municipal councillors, and the Anglican Bishop formally offered God's blessing to the Tunnel.²⁶ Liverpool looked to history to seek confidence in its future; the tunnel's opening celebrations included a pageant of women dressed as the 'Spirit of Liverpool' in medieval clothes and bearing beacons of virtues such as charity, progress, vision and commerce.²⁷ Crucially, the tunnel was presented as a symbol of confidence in the city's economy: "What, indeed, is the great new Merseyside Road Tunnel but an act of faith unmatched probably in all of Europe?" asked the Lord Mayor.²⁸

GRAND DESIGNS

Liverpool's urban regeneration was by no means limited to the Mersey Tunnel. In common with many other cities after 1918, Liverpool attacked its housing problem with great vigour: around 140,000 (15% of its population) people were re-housed by Liverpool Corporation interwar, by 1939 in 33,355 purpose-built suburban houses.²⁹ Again, this investment in housing was portrayed by local politicians as a sign of Liverpool's stable economy.³⁰ Housing reform

²⁴ Thomas White, *Memorandum of the Chairman of the Mersey Tunnel Joint Committee on the Present Financial Position*, (Liverpool, 1932).

²⁵ Sir Thomas White, Chairman, Mersey Tunnel Committee, *Liverpool Daily Post Supplement*, 1 June 1931, 'The Ambassador of Merseyside's Industry and Commerce'.

²⁶ *The Times*, 19 July 1934, p.9.

²⁷ John Belchem (ed.), *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History*, (Liverpool, 2006), p.36.

²⁸ *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 1 June 1931, p. 1.

²⁹ Madeline McKenna, 'The Suburbanisation of the Working – Class Population of Liverpool between the Wars', *Social History*, 16, 2, 1991, p.173.

³⁰ Liverpool Promotional Map, Civic Week, 18 – 25 September 1924, British Empire Exhibition.

was accompanied by developing a comprehensive public transport system that fanned out from the city centre to the new suburbs: in 1939 the Liverpool Corporation claimed their public transport system accounted for 282,045,776 passenger journeys and covered 24,620,064 miles each year.³¹ The result of the Corporation's investment represented 'the metamorphosis of a near-derelict undertaking into a vibrant thriving network of integrated tram and bus services'.³²

Liverpool's architectural form was also transformed, led by the pioneering work of Sir Charles Reilly, architectural expert and Emeritus Professor at the University of Liverpool. His own architectural work was limited, but after travelling around the East Coast of America and with the help of William Lever, he became dedicated to the promotion of architecture in the British national and local press. Reilly convinced Lord Lever to finance the first ever Chair in Planning in 1912, which was taken up by Reilly's friend Patrick Abercrombie, 1915-35, and together they developed and professionalized the discipline of civic planning and design. Reilly was instrumental in driving Liverpool's urban regeneration by campaigning for better buildings; encouraging investment and by heavily promoting the city's new forms of architecture in the press and his own publications.³³

Reilly utilised his role at the School of Architecture very effectively. Most notably, he encouraged his students to travel to America and arranged an exchange system with architects offices in New York to expose his students to the most cutting edge ideas and methods in architecture and urban planning. Herbert Rowse was to prove himself the most important of Reilly's students and was responsible for Liverpool's many art deco and modernist buildings that emerged in the 1930s, such as Martins Bank (1932), the Mersey Tunnel entrances and ventilation building exteriors (1934) and, perhaps most famously, the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall (1939). Reilly's influence also extended to Liverpool council directly and helped to create a special lectureship at the University for John Brodie, City Engineer and designer of the Mersey Tunnel. Reilly's close links with the East Coast of America, passion for innovation in architecture and civic planning and commitment to regenerating Liverpool was fundamental in achieving the city's modernist architectural style, and placed the city at the forefront of trends in urban design.

³¹ Liverpool Corporation, *City of Liverpool Official Handbook 1939*, (Liverpool, 1939), p.95.

³² J. B. Horne and T. B. Maund, *Liverpool Transport*, Vol. 3, 1931 – 1939, (Glossop, 1987), p.7.

³³ Charles Reilly, *Some Liverpool Streets and Buildings in 1921* (Liverpool, 1921); Charles Reilly, *Scaffolding in the sky: a semi-architectural autobiography*, (London, 1938)

AMBITIOUS AND ASSERTIVE

Liverpool was able to invest in urban redevelopment because of a significant (above inflation) increase in income, particularly from loans and grants from the central government: Salvidge's ability to make the Mersey Tunnel possible lay in convincing Parliament to finance 50% of the Tunnel's £7 million cost. Liverpool's rateable income also increased, as did their profits from public transport and amenities like electricity and gas. For instance, Liverpool Corporation had a total income of £5,366,155 (£2,753,508 from rates) in 1924, rising to £9,400,589 by 1935 (£4,367,220 from rates).³⁴ Liverpool Corporation also invested in providing municipal gas and electricity and it clearly paid off as the electricity department made a profit of £456,336 in 1924, rising to £784,843 in 1935.³⁵ Nevertheless, although their success in raising finance was key, the real force behind Liverpool's regeneration lay in the power of a strong local government, driven by passionate individuals such as Salvidge and Reilly.

The Conservative Party was committed on both a local and national level to communicate and engage with the new, cross-class electorate, who threatened the ruling elite with political extremism, and so ensured that a more populist and inclusive political culture emerged between the two World Wars. Fundamentally, however, it was the agency held by local politicians and their ability to implement an innovative approach to political and economic turbulence that ensured Liverpool weathered the worst economic depression Britain has ever seen. Liverpool Corporation's success was evident in an improving economy in the 1930s; a remarkably content electorate; and a revitalised local culture that stimulated shopping and commercial culture throughout the city.³⁶

Following the Second World War, Britain witnessed the increased power of central government and the emasculation of local government. When Liverpool again faced similarly serious challenges to its economy, it did so without able champions and the city suffered, witnessing high levels of unemployment,

³⁴ £5,366,155 would have been worth £5,801,349 in 1935, based on a calculation using the GDP. Lawrence H. Officer, 'Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 – 2005' MeasuringWorth.Com, 2006. www.measuringworth.com calculator. Accessed 27 March 2013.

³⁵ Ministry of Health, *Local Taxation Returns, England and Wales* (Her Majesty's Stationary Office: London, 1926 – 1936).

³⁶ See Charlotte Wildman, 'The Spectacle of Interwar Liverpool and Manchester', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester 2007, pp.100-136.

poverty, urban decay and emigration.³⁷ In the words of novelist Beryl Bainbridge, “someone’s murdered Liverpool and got away with it.”³⁸ In contrast to the post-1945 period, an ambitious and assertive local government and committed civic patrons, equipped with the power and ability to invest in their own city, not only saved Liverpool in the 1930s but placed it at the forefront of innovations in civic design, architecture and urban planning.³⁹

³⁷ See Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 2004), Epilogue.

³⁸ As quoted in Joseph Sharples, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Liverpool*, (Yale University Press: London, 2004), p.37.



A NEW JERUSALEM: HEALTH SERVICES IN BERMONDSEY

Sue Goss

Bermondsey is not a nice place to live in. The air is thick and sooty. The smells are - well, they are. The streets are dingy and grey. The houses are small, poky and inconvenient. There are no noble buildings and no fine monuments. The people are herded together, overcrowded per room, overcrowded per house, overcrowded per acre. They have no space to move, no room to store their clothes and there is little chance of privacy or quiet.¹

So wrote Dr Alfred Salter in 1920 as he began his GP practice in the centre of one of London's poorest communities. Bermondsey stretched along the south east side of the Thames, dominated by the vast Surrey Docks in Rotherhithe.² The area featured dramatically in London's statistics for overcrowding and child mortality. Deaths here from tuberculosis, diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles and childbirth were far higher than the rest of London. Overcrowding was rife, with tenements and unsanitary cottages crowded into the tangle of warehouses and factories.³

Few middle class or even lower middle class people lived in the borough. Alfred Salter, the socialist GP and his wife and children were unusual in choosing to live among the squalor, and Salter tirelessly campaigned for health provision, providing his services for free to those who could not afford them. Trade unionism had spread by the turn of the century from the elite workers to the unskilled and semi-skilled workers of the docks and factories, and women began to organise through the Federation of Women Workers. The Labour Party, led by Salter, became the centre of social and political life during the 1920s and 1930s.

¹ Alfred Salter writing in Bermondsey Labour Magazine, April 1920.

² The docks imported grains and timber, and spawned vast related industries - wood and furniture production, milling, corn factors and granary keepers. Other industries include engineering, brewing and food manufacture. By the middle years of the 20th century, Bermondsey and neighbouring Southwark became the home of food factories employing thousands of local people - famous names including Oxo, Crosse and Blackwell, Pearce Duff, Sainsburys, Shuttleworths, Peak Freans and Brook Bond.

³ In this tiny area of London, the population grew from 46,000 in 1801, to peak in 1891 at 136,000 and thereafter declined steadily until by 1961 it was again around 50,000.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

The metropolitan boroughs - created in 1899 as a new lower tier below the powerful London County Council - were large enough to get things done, but small enough to know the community intimately. Bermondsey was won by Labour in 1922 and, with a few hiccups, remained Labour until the 1964/5 reorganisation of London government, when the borough was merged into the larger London Borough of Southwark.

Alfred Salter and his council colleagues had a dream of turning Bermondsey into a:

“New Jerusalem, whose citizens shall have reason to feel pride in their common possession, in their civil patriotism, in their public spirit, in the joint sharing of burdens and their collective efforts to make happier the lot of every single dweller in their midst.”

Bermondsey Council's ambition - in the context of the very limited role of local government in the rest of the country - was boundless. Borough councils had far fewer powers than the giant London County Council but were responsible for street lighting and cleanings, refuse collection, libraries and galleries, baths and wash-houses, parks, maternity and child welfare and public health services except hospitals. Back in 1920 the Board of Guardians was still responsible for poor relief - and Labour Guardians in Bermondsey consistently paid out relief that was far higher than in neighbouring boroughs. In Bermondsey the council was also responsible for statutory undertakings - gas and electricity.

The council saw its task as improving services for local people to demonstrate 'municipal socialism' in action. The council took practical steps to demonstrate the principles of collective provision. Bermondsey set up a tuberculosis dispensary, experimented with the then new sunlight treatment, sent patients with tuberculosis to Switzerland and finally built a solarium in Bermondsey itself.

Fairby Grange, a country house that Salter had bought in 1917 was turned into a convalescent home for mothers after confinement. A propaganda campaign was begun to promote preventative care, with films, leaflets, electric signs, town hall lectures and open air demonstrations. Health services were expanded, with a new Health Centre in Grange Rd, which contained maternity, tuberculosis and

dental clinics, a solarium and a foot clinic. Municipal welfare centres and under-fives centres were set up, free insulin distributed to diabetics, and free milk, eggs and fresh food to 'necessitous mothers'.

Other services were expanded. Bermondsey Council opened new and luxurious baths in Grange Rd in 1927, a public laundry was established, new lecture halls were built, and a municipal choir and orchestra was set up. The municipal electricity enterprise kept electricity prices low, gave out free light-bulbs and hired out or sold electrical appliances. Under Ada Salter, Alfred's wife - also a councillor - the Beautification Committee planted trees, encouraged garden competitions and grew flowers in the grim backyards.

The council was committed to sweep away Bermondsey's slums. Its idea was to demolish two thirds of the borough and rebuild it as a garden city. It was then that it came into conflict with central government and the LCC. Government insisted that the new housing had to be in new tenement flats, rather than the cottages desired by Bermondsey Council. Bermondsey called meetings, rallies, and mobilised the unions and the ratepayers - all of whom unanimously instructed the council to carry on with the policy of building cottages. Permission was finally granted by the short-lived Labour government in 1924, but withdrawn again by their Conservative successors. Eventually, the council completed the Salisbury St scheme, the first and last part of the garden city. To this day, an island of cottages with big, rambling gardens stands in the midst of the riverside flats.

A WIDER SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The council was never working in isolation. The close-packed nature of the community created solidarity. Neighbours were also comrades at work, shared the same landlords, met at the union meeting, queued at the same cinema, gossiped on the tenement stairs. This created an effective communications network; ideas and news of trouble, or of strikes, travelled fast. The council was always closely linked into a wide network within civil society.

Bermondsey was at the centre of a new social movement, the hub of working people's social clubs and political parties. Well attended public meetings were held every week in the assembly halls attached to the public baths, and rallies attracted big name speakers - Lansbury, Macdonald, Brockway, Saklatvala

and Maxton all came. The co-operative movement held meetings and lectures. The women's sections met twice weekly, and had a full time organiser. West Bermondsey had a social club, a swimming club, a youth club and a football club. The Labour Party organised socials, outings and dances taking the children to the seaside and the old folks to the cinema. Surgeries and advice sessions were run from party headquarters and the Labour Institute put on weekly lectures. The party ran a mass distribution journal delivered door to door explaining council policies and persuading people to come to meetings.

Of course, the politics of the time reflected the tight-knit nature of the community. The local Labour party reinforced a code of respectability and contribution, and of a self-reliant self-organised community. The respectable working class was at pains to distinguish itself from the feckless, the criminal and the undeserving. Few immigrants arrived into the borough and someone from a few streets away was treated as an outsider. The programme was one of practical change - decent housing health care, education and open space. Socialism was about "social justice and a living wage"⁴ - municipal rather than national in scope.

WHO PAID?

Borough councils were the poor relations to county councils in terms of power and resources. But the marginal nature of government aid also gave them the freedom to extend service provision without recourse to central government if local ratepayers would accept the financial burden. Poplar's struggles had led to some rate equalisation, but only in relation to poor relief. Government subsidy came from some specific grants, and some assigned revenues - but it never amounted to much until after the war. In 1922 about four-fifths of local authority income came from the rates.

So the radicalism of Bermondsey Council was all the more ambitious since it was almost entirely funded by taxing the very poor population of the borough. The council was committed to high levels of service despite the low rate base and the poverty of local people. Bermondsey's rates were double those of neighbouring boroughs and its spending on health many times higher than other equivalent councils. The borough also borrowed when it could to finance capital schemes.

⁴ Interview with councillor Fanny Stroud.

By 1938 the South London Press reported that “Bermondsey owes one third of south London’s nine million debt.”⁵ The South London Press was never a Labour supporting paper - but in the 1930s it wrote to a leader acknowledging the success of Bermondsey:

“Because Bermondsey’s rate is nearly double that of Wandsworth, we are not going to say that it is too high. The justification of a rate depends entirely on what the rate-payers get in return for their money, and Bermondsey, suffering from all kinds of disadvantage, is rapidly becoming one of the best governed boroughs in London...so great have been the improvements that many parts are unrecognisable as the slum areas of years ago, and so long as the ratepayers are prepared to pay for these improvements they can have no grievance against the council.”⁶

Of course, like all radical councils, it did not confine its actions to the pragmatic. Bermondsey was also keen to make symbolic gestures - flying the red flag over the Town Hall, refusing to take part in armistice celebrations, organising anti-war demonstrations and, memorably, in 1935 refusing to receive the King when he proposed to visit - arguing that the cost would not be justified. Bermondsey, like Poplar, tried to withstand the pressures from the auditors to cut their workers' wages during the depression - although Salter's more pragmatic approach led to a climb down to prevent councillors being disqualified. Salter argued that it would be a disaster if *“the very pick and cream of our citizens were eliminated from the municipal life of our borough.”* It is a mark of Salter's sway both in the party and in the community that the decision to accept the cut in wages was made in a packed meeting of all the employees - 800 staunch trade unionists - and carried unanimously.

DREAM OF A BETTER FUTURE

The first thing to wonder at is the imaginative energy that the early politicians and their managers demonstrated. Their vision was not simply to make minor changes but to create a garden city, to create world class health services and to set trees and parks among dark miserable slums. The dream of a better

⁵ South London Press 8th April 1938

⁶ South London Press May 1930

future was shared by the workforce and the community, and drove constant innovation, and a refusal to accept the standards and constraints of national government. The health services in Bermondsey were so advanced that the new NHS set up by the 1945 Labour government closed down the beloved Grange Rd Health Centre as the expense was considered unsustainable within a national service. Despite the passionate support Bermondsey people gave to the Atlee government, their own health services got worse, not better.

The second is the confidence the community had in the democratic process, and its ability to deliver for them. Bermondsey Council never saw itself as a business providing services for customers. Current 'management speak' would have bewildered them. The council's services were the practical expression of the will of the people. Councillors, their workforce, and the community were closely interlinked - most of the workforce lived locally - and through the network of activities the council was not separate from civil society - it was at the core of it.

The social conditions that led to Bermondsey's connectivity no longer exist, and could not be recreated. Much of the shared culture was tribal, closed, hostile to outsiders - and as London became more diverse, and newcomers and immigrants arrived, the closed nature of the white working class communities at times bred racism and intolerance. But could a different sort of connectivity - one capable of working with difference and diversity, using looser networks, virtual links and social media - reconnect councils to civil society and to citizens?

The third is the disproving of the assumption always made by politicians that citizens will vote against high taxes. The poor community of Bermondsey was willing to sustain high levels of rates because they valued the community services they received in exchange - services they could not afford as individuals. Could we imagine a growth of collectively provided services in the future that would add sufficient value to our lives for us to voluntarily accept the necessary taxation? If localities were able once again to raise their own taxes - might it be possible for innovative communities to make radical choices about their future?

Of course it was a different time, and communities and political loyalties were very different. In those early, exploratory days, Bermondsey faced fewer legal and financial constraints, and had the freedom to raise money. But in reality the

problems and challenges they faced were far more daunting than the problems a modern local authority has to tackle.

In the 1920s radical councils were reinventing what local government was, and what it could do. Bermondsey was a tiny council compared with the modern unitary boroughs and cities - but that didn't get in the way of their vision of a better future and a determination to do something about it.⁷ Perhaps we have allowed the culture of targets and compliance, the tangle of constraints, limits, regulations and restrictions to dull our imaginations and confuse the narrow scope of current thinking with an absolute constraint on action. Have we forgotten to dream?

⁷ More of the research for this essay can be found in Sue Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, Edinburgh University Press (1988).

POSTSCRIPT: A LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

Clr Doug Taylor

Leader, Enfield Council

This collection of essays gives us a fascinating insight into the history of local governance and local political leadership. It also gives us pause for thought; an opportunity to reflect on what we can learn from the past and particularly from the innovation and drive of passionate local advocates. What marks all the iconic figures is their boldness, energy and clear goals; seizing opportunity by the throat. What distinguishes them from each other are a variety of styles; some collaborative, some autocratic, but all intensely personal. Perhaps any style can work, just being true to yourself, and being bold and decisive works.

I'm a great believer in seeing what we can learn from what's gone before, but not in being rooted in the past. As a Council Leader myself, I recognise some of the challenges that Chamberlain, Morrison, Salter and Salvidge faced. Very much like the issues facing Liverpool in the 1930s, today's Enfield has lost much of the manufacturing industry that brought prosperity to the area for a large part of the 20th century. Unemployment and child poverty have risen steadily. Providing enough decent homes for a growing population is a huge challenge, particularly in an area surrounded by green belt and prized for the relatively low density housing that makes up so much of what was once the Middlesex 'Metroland'.

In common with the examples in this publication, we recognise that the solution has to be radical and it has to look beyond the things that we normally do. I particularly like the example of Chamberlain, who had his own vision and concept of style, buying up the assets he needed to enable him to fulfil his vision for Birmingham. Enfield Council doesn't have that kind of cash (!) but we are the landowner for several thousand acres of the borough. That gives us a great opportunity to look at how we can deliver the jobs that the area really needs. Here again we are looking to the past, because we want to

(re)build on the area's long tradition of market gardening. We think that local supply chains are really starting to matter to consumers and that we have the opportunity to be a proverbial breadbasket for London (although we might be growing tomatoes and cucumbers rather than wheat).

Like Salvidge in Liverpool, we are looking at how key capital projects can revitalise an area. We have put together persuasive arguments for inward investment and we've recently secured a huge upgrade to a local railway station at Angel Road in Edmonton. This will revitalise the area and pave the way for a multibillion pound regeneration scheme called Meridian Water. And we are fighting hard for further rail upgrades on the West Anglia line which we hope will eventually connect us up to Cambridge and Stansted Airport, placing us at the centre of a new fulcrum of economic activity. In essence, it will be our Mersey Tunnel – the Stansted corridor.

The story of Bermondsey is fascinating for the way in which the local council was so fundamental to the lives of local people. Enfield is much larger than Bermondsey and our communities are less homogenous. But fulfilling a central co-ordinating role and working with all local service providers to ensure the best services for residents is core to our approach and our concept that it is the co-ordinating council that uniquely can deliver stronger and more cohesive communities.

Finally I admire Morrison's approach to publicity. We need to ensure that people know what we do and what is available and we need to be open and transparent. In Enfield we are hugely proud of our museums, galleries and heritage facilities and we want everyone to have the chance to enjoy them. The public have recognised these efforts with increased footfall and satisfaction.

Reading these essays, I am curious as to what future generations will make of the contributions of today's local authorities. I'm hopeful that, in spite of the financial constraints and a highly interventionist Whitehall, history will adjudge us to be as good at finding creative, innovative solutions as our colleagues were in the 1870s and 1930s. Putting a stamp on a place, for today and tomorrow, to better the lives of our citizens, should be the judgement of success.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CATHERINE STAITE

Catherine Staite is Director of INLOGOV, The Institute of Local Government Studies at the University of Birmingham. She provides consultancy and facilitation to local authorities and their partners, on a wide range of issues including on improving outcomes, efficiency, partnership working, strategic planning and organisational development, including integration of services and functions. Catherine joined INLOGOV from OPM, where she was Director of Organisational Development and Policy. Previous roles include Head of User Focus and Deputy Head of Policy for the Audit Commission and Regional Partnerships and Planning Manager for the Legal Services Commission. Previous non-executive roles include non-executive director of Rampton Hospital, Vice Chair of Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust and member of the Board of Visitors at HMP Hull.

GEORGE W. JONES

George W. Jones has been Emeritus Professor of government at the London School of Economics since October 2003. He is a graduate of Jesus College, Oxford, where he studied Modern History, and obtained his doctorate for research while at Nuffield College, Oxford. He was for three years Lecturer in Government at the University of Leeds before coming to the LSE in 1996. He was Professor of Government from 1976 to 2003, lecturing on public administration, local government and British government and politics. He has authored, co-authored and edited a number of books, chapters and articles on British central and local government, the Cabinet and Prime Minister, and Parliament, and he has made a particular study of the evolution of the Office of British Prime Ministers and their network of advisers.

DR CHARLOTTE WILDMAN

Dr Charlotte Wildman is Lecturer in Modern British History at the University of Manchester. She mainly writes about the period between the two world wars and focuses on the history of British cities, particularly regarding the forms of urban culture that were open to women, such as civic, consumer and religious. The urban North is often the focus of Charlotte's research and she aims to undermine the many negative stereotypes about Northern cities during the twentieth century and draws attention to the influence of innovations and trends in urban planning from New York City and Chicago on cities such as Liverpool and Manchester. Charlotte is currently working on a book entitled *Spectacular Urban Culture in Britain, 1918-1939*.

SUE GOSS

Sue Goss has many years' experience of working with local, regional and central government. She has been a Director and now Principal at the Office for Public Management since 1989 where she specialises in the fields of strategy development, partnership working, governance, management of change and leadership development. Sue also taught at the Leadership Academy for executive councillors and has worked in several authorities on top team development and on leadership skills for councillors.

If we want to understand the future of local government, we must first understand its past. Because while technologies, demographics and social attitudes change, the fundamentals do not: Britain has faced recessions, poverty and budget deficits before, and for the last 150 years local government has done its best to meet these challenges.

This collection brings together four essays on the history of local government. Bermondsey, Birmingham, Liverpool and London provide the stage and politicians from each of the major political parties take leading roles.

We hope today's council leaders will reflect on the successes of past pioneers. Inspirational examples from local government's history should serve to remind us of the power of creative ideas.

**DG3 to insert
MS3 LPBW Logo**