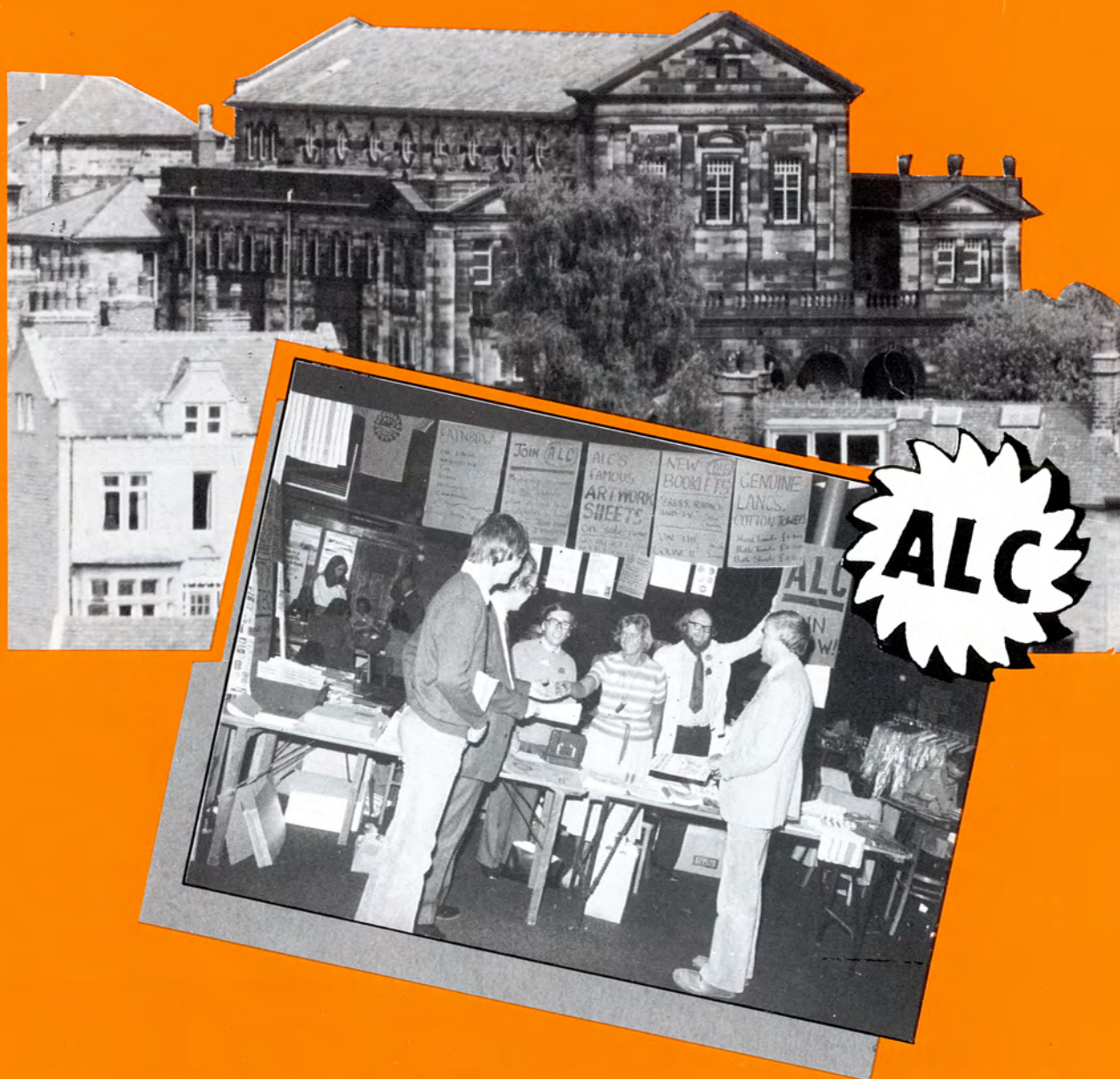


Action with the ALC

Ten years at The Birchcliffe Centre

by Phoebe Winch





ACTION WITH THE ALC

A history of ten years at The Birchcliffe Centre

by Phoebe Winch

ACTION WITH THE ALC is dedicated to
RICHARD WAINWRIGHT, Liberal MP for Colne Valley, 1966-70, 1974-87
— our earliest, and best, friend.

Author's Note

A week may be a long time in politics but two months is not a long time in which to fit in writing this book. The research has, of necessity, been based on whatever records were easily to hand and very recent history has not yet been tidily documented and filed. Therefore, many mistakes will have been made, important facts overlooked and, above all, many people who were crucial to the history of ALC may not have been mentioned - or, if mentioned, given inadequate emphasis. There are, in fact, too many people to name, because every member of ALC has contributed to the ALC story.

My brief, and the length of book envisaged, means that I have ignored the national political background, let alone the international political background. Unemployment is not mentioned, nor is the Falklands War. Presidents and Prime Ministers come and go . . . Indeed, this book has been written before the result of the General Election 1987 is known. ALC, regardless, gets on with its job, and does it. This book is about just that.

Phoebe Winch

Phoebe Winch, when in Dorset during the 1970s, was an Urban District Councillor, Town Councillor, Mayor and a County Councillor. After moving to Bristol in 1980, she started the Dowry Printing Society. She joined ALC in 1971, was a member of Standing Committee from 1972 to 1975 and 1977 to 1985, when she became President.

Introduction

Is this the "First Report" — back leaflet? Printed on the semi-glossy paper of the period, 1956, Southend.

FIRST REPORT ON THE WORK OF YOUR COUNCIL FROM Councillor DAVID EVANS

Dear Electors,

In my election address last May I undertook to report periodically upon the activities of the Council, and to give details of my voting record. This is the first of those reports.

First, let me say that I cannot mention everything. That would be an impossibility. I can deal with the main topics only.

The committee of "distinguished academics" who wrote the Local Government Report to the Liberal Party. Long, (127 pages), boring, but it laid the foundations for our policy today.

The Liberal Party Local Government Committee was appointed in May, 1961, with the following terms of reference:

"To consider the structure, finance and organisation of local government in England and Wales and what Liberal policy should be in relation to this."

The membership of the Committee was as follows:
Councillor Bryan Keith-Lucas (Chairman)
Mr. Peter Billenness (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Pratap Chitnis
Mr. Elliott Dodds
Councillor David E. Evans
Councillor Peter Howell-Williams
Mr. John Sargent
Councillor David Spreckley
Alderman Clifford Stephenson
Councillor John Wilson

The justification for this book is that it is ten years since the Association of Liberal Councillors moved to the Birchcliffe Centre, in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. The justification for thinking this is important is that no other political party has an equivalent body - nor could have. This is something our political opponents, and most political commentators, find difficult to understand.

The role of Liberal Councillors and community campaigners are central to the Liberal philosophy of 'helping to organise people in communities to take and use power' (1970 Eastbourne Assembly resolution on community politics). Our Councillors are not seen as failed MPs, nor are they operating at a lower (i.e. inferior) tier of government than the House of Commons. In a sense, local campaigners and Councillors are the modern Liberal Party in that they are practising what we preach. It is no accident that many of the architects of that resolution at the 1970 Assembly were also the builders of today's ALC. It says something of their commitment to their beliefs that most of them are still active in the ALC, and in their local communities, today, seventeen years later.

But what is ALC, in practical terms? It will be clear from this book that it is not 'the militant tendency' of the Liberal Party, nor is it 'the loony fringe' - although it has been called both. More seriously: is it the Local Government Department of the Party? Is it simply an Association existing to serve its members? Or is it a political base outside London for a radical movement which tries to change the political direction of the Party? ALC is, and has been, all three - the emphasis varying from year to year, sometimes in reaction to events and sometimes by its own determination.

That ALC has a style and ethos of its own is not in doubt. He or she 'is an ALC type' is a clear description within the Party.

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Ten years ago

Ten years ago ALC had 340 members, a budget of under £2,000 and employed one full-time member of staff - Tony Greaves. Both the finance for his employment, and the offer of free accommodation at the Birchcliffe Centre, came from the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust. The ALC owes its success very largely to the generosity and faith of the trustees of the JRSST. Their only repayment can be in the growth of Liberalism. Ten years ago there were only 896 Liberal Councillors on principal Councils, of which only 3 groups had any political influence.

Now - only ten years later - there are over 3,600 Alliance Councillors and 124 groups with political influence.

Now

The ALC has 2,500 member (any Liberal, not just Councillors, may join and any Social Democrat may join as an associate member); a full-time staff of 10; a budget for 1987 of £128,000 (of which 21% is a grant from the Liberal Party Organisation). Annual elections - by postal ballot of the membership - are held for the Officers: the President, Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Similar elections are held for the eight members of the Standing Committee, and the Scots and the Welsh elect a representative each from their respective memberships. ALC also elects seven representatives to Party Council and those members of ALC who are members of principal Councils elect eight of their number to Party Council, and one of their number to the Party's National Executive. ALC holds an annual conference for members.

ALC produces six 'Members' Bulletins' a year, plus numerous briefings; 'Campaign Mailing', which links national and local campaigning issues, which anyone can subscribe to; 'Grapevine', which is produced for Council groups on a subscription basis; and, jointly with the Parliamentary Party and the Liberal Parliamentary Association, 'Parliamentary Mailing' by subscription. On ALC's sales list there are 132 booklets, plus artwork sheets, badges etc.

ALC provides an information service, training and personal advice to Council groups, particularly

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

In the beginning

those in positions of influence; providing support for the Parliamentary Party; organising conferences; and contributing to policy formation at a national level. It initiates and co-ordinates single issues campaigns. A member of the ALC staff is Advertising Manager of Liberal News. At the request of the Party in 1985, ALC launched Hebden Royd Publications Ltd. to act as the publishing house for the Party, and has a majority of the appointed directors on the Board.

In the beginning

This book is not a formal history of the ALC (and one should be written before records disappear and memories fade). It was conceived as a booklet to celebrate ten years of ALC at the Birchcliffe Centre. But we must sketch in the beginnings - although the following disjointed notes do not do justice to the work and vision of those involved at the time.

In 1946 an advisory committee was set up by the Liberal Party to look at local government. But it wasn't until the late fifties that Richard Wainwright became the prime mover in setting up a local government department at the headquarters (LPO) in Victoria Street, London. Pratap Chitnis was the first Local Government Officer appointed in 1959 - the year that Liberal Councillors were in control in Blackpool and Jeremy Thorpe made an entire party political broadcast about local government.

Michael Meadowcroft, who was appointed Pratap Chitnis's assistant in 1961, took over from him in 1963 - Liberals had made astonishing gains in 1962. It was a period of expansion. Michael Meadowcroft had an assistant and two secretaries. In 1964 Richard Wainwright (he was a member of the Party's Organisation Committee) asked David Evans, who had been elected a Councillor in South-end in 1956, to be Chairman of the Local Government Department. At the same time, Jo Grimond had attracted a number of bright academics into the Party, who wrote lengthy reports, but who laid the foundations of our policy commitment to government at local level.

The Party's Annual Reports began to give more and more space to the doings of the Local Government Department. David Evans and David Steel did a party political broadcast together in 1965, just before May, but unfortunately failed to stop hundreds of Councillors who had been elected



Local government People were respected by the Party as Top People — producing new ideas . . .

Interview . . . Interview . . .

Lord Chitnis -
Local Government Officer,
LPO, 1960-63

"The first job as the first local government officer at LPO was to find out who our Councillors were. But how? The only way we could think

Action with the ALC

in 1962 losing their seats.

Following the 1964 General Election, the Party was in poor shape financially. The Councillors were used to receiving their Bulletins and mailings free from LPO. It seemed the right moment to proceed with seeking independence from LPO. Memories are unclear as to exactly when the inaugural meeting of the Association of Liberal Councillors was, or how it was constituted. Michael Meadowcroft had organised a Conference at Leamington Spa in 1965 and the Councillors attending agreed they were willing to pay subscriptions to be independent and continue to receive mailings. David Evans was Chair of the new organisation.

However vague memories are, by 1969 the ALC was sufficiently established as a 'recognised body' of the Party to be included in the new Constitution agreed at a Special Assembly in September.

Meanwhile, Michael Meadowcroft had himself become a Leeds City Councillor and left LPO to work for the Yorkshire Federation. LPO had also moved, to Exchange Court off the Strand. In the move, the famous, and painstakingly compiled, Chitnis card-index of Councillors was thrown out. It had been kept scrupulously up to date by Michael, then by Heather Baxter (now Greaves). Then, the S - Z section had got lost and for some reason the remainder were presumed to be useless by LPO. The cards were given to the Young Liberals, who used the blank backs for their own membership records. David Deeley took over as Local Government Officer in 1969.

Margate, 1970

In 1970 the 'Red Guard' of the Young Liberals put forward an amendment to a motion at the Margate Assembly. It was carried and became known as the Community Politics resolution. It reflected the way YLs Tony Greaves, Peter Hain, Gordon Lishman, David Mumford, and Lawrence Freedman of ULS (and others) were thinking. Up in Liverpool (Sir) Trevor Jones and Cyril Carr were forging ahead putting the ideas into practice - in fact, they had been doing so since they produced the first 'Focus' in Old Swan ward in 1966. Trevor Jones remembers: 'It was duplicated, home-spun and amateur, but it had a quality I think we've lost. It was a community news letter - not a strident political leaflet. During elections we produced Election Specials - meaning this one would be party political. We got our first off-set in 1970. It cut costs when we started to expand, because we could

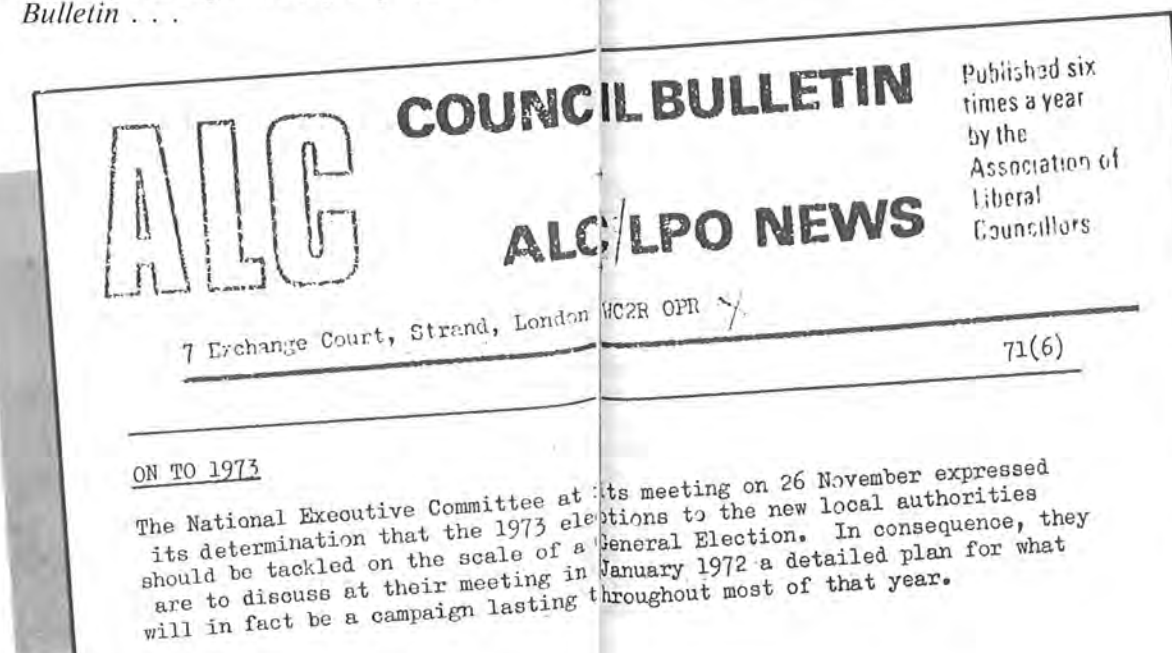
of was literally to start at one end of Fleet Street and work our way along, visiting every office of every local newspaper, copying out all their local election results. We put all these in a card index, and then kept it up to date. It was a unique record. No other political party had one as comprehensive. By the end of the year, I had visited everywhere that had Liberal Councillors and met them all. It wasn't difficult - there weren't very many. A lot of them were very elderly Aldermen, and not especially Liberal.

"The problem was to persuade Liberals to fight local elections at all - and where we were traditionally strong, they fought as Independents.

"We produced the first local government handbook for the 1961 elections. The research department, and a lot of distinguished academics, produced the report on Local Government.

"The office of the local government department was in the kitchen, where the research department made their coffee. My assistant, Mary, was wooed and won by Jim Crossley through the serving hatch. Michael Meadowcroft joined as my assistant in 1961, and I handed over to him in 1963."

Fighting words from early duplicated Bulletin . . .



Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1960s-1970s

Interview . . . Interview . . .

Michael Meadowcroft
Local Government Officer
1961-69

"At nineteen I was a bank clerk and didn't like it much. Pratap Chitnis advertised for an assistant in the Local Government Department at Liberal Party Headquarters. I applied, and got it, because, so Pratap said, I was the only applicant cheeky enough to ask for my travel expenses.

"My first job was to keep Pratap's diary dates while he went off to be agent at Orplington. Then, late 1962, he became Press Officer at LPO and I took over his job.

"I travelled the country - even now, people remember me from those days. We were very efficient and had a sort of travelling circus - John Whiteside, David Griffiths, David Evans and myself. We went around telling people how to fight elections. We produced the Bulletin and local government handbooks. We even produced artwork and grumble sheets. But all this, of course, had nothing to do with community politics.

"There were some huge Liberal groups on Councils in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The problem was that all over the place Liberals would form strange electoral pacts, and in return for being unopposed wouldn't fight Tories, or Labour, according to local conditions. Then, in other places, like Wales, Liberals fought each other.

"Once elected, Liberals were always

buy cheap paper.' And so the off-set printing revolution started. It meant Liberals could afford to communicate and campaign by doing their own printing. It was at least 10 years before the other parties started doing the same.

At the Scarborough Assembly in 1971, Trevor Jones was standing as a candidate for President-elect. He held a meeting about How to Win Elections. 'I couldn't match the other candidates intellectually or match their other suitable qualities. But I did have a simple formula for success.' Trevor became President-elect and tried to urge the Party to become a campaigning party. He was told by the NEC that the Party wasn't yet ready for it. A month later a Liverpool Council by-election was won with a 41% swing. He wrote to David Steel and Jeremy Thorpe, 'You may not be ready for the methods, but you may be ready for the results.'

'Moribund'

'ALC was moribund then', he recalls, 'The trouble was we were a political party with no politicians'. But not so moribund that the members, led noisily by John Smithson, editor of 'Radical Bulletin', didn't shout down the officers of ALC at a rowdy meeting during the 1971 Assembly. Cyril Carr, Chairman, had issued a pre-Assembly press release in the name of ALC calling for the expulsion of certain Young Liberals (Peter Hain et al) from the Party.

Quarterly Bulletins were still being produced from the Local Government Department at LPO, 7 Exchange Court, off the Strand. They were poorly duplicated, with no pictures, or even headlines. One include the whole of a 3,000 word speech by Emlyn Hooson MP. The news item was that Gordon Lishman and Barry Standon were going to be travelling organisers, as the National Executive 'has expressed its determination to tackle the 1973 County Council elections on the scale of a general election'. They did, indeed, travel about - in two little yellow vans during 1972. Logistically it was somewhat absurd. Gordon's areas were both N. Yorkshire and Dorset.

In 1973 Sir Trevor Jones' crusade for campaigning, and actually winning elections, bore fruit. Individuals, scattered around the country producing leaflets, petitions and grumble sheets, won seats on the newly organised County Councils. It was the first breakthrough.

History doesn't tell us what ALC was doing

Action with the ALC

during the run up to these elections - except for a short letter from David Deeley telling members that 'ALC is back in business - the Conference will be at Birmingham', dated June '73.

Peter Freitag, chair of ALC in the early seventies, claims 'ALC was very influential then in terms of radical policy making. Our Assembly housing motion was totally radical and new, we made positive contributions to government policy such as introducing the question of declaration of interest and a code of conduct.' Nevertheless, those who wanted to 'do something with the ALC' felt frustrated by its inertia. Standing Committee meetings were depressing affairs, often held in dusty rooms with creaking chairs in Birmingham - as a token not-in-London gesture.

In 1974 Preston Keeling was appointed Local Government Officer and took over the Bulletin - still duplicated and still somewhat wordy. One issue contained 4,500 words of evidence submitted by Gordon Lishman (among others) to the DoE on Neighbourhood Councils. Gordon had left his yellow van to become Director of Policy Promotion.

But the Bulletin began to carry articles by members - such as one from John Ross, shocked by his local Braintree Conservatives wanting to introduce a local income tax. Another Bulletin lists members with particular expertise. Tony Greaves is listed as 'a leading practitioner of community politics'.

Standing Committee thought it would be a good idea to produce a list of the members' names and addresses, and circulate it to all 500 of them. I offered to get it printed cheaply. It turned out to be the most expensive and pointless idea. We had to stop the printers after only about 100 copies or it would have bankrupted ALC for good. But the list makes interesting reading. Three of the then current MPs were members - Alan Beith, Graham Tope and David Austick. Names that spring out of the list include Michael Meadowcroft, Stephen Ross and Geraint Howells, John Waller, Gryffyd Evans, Richard Kemp, Chris Bradford, Stuart Mole and Keith Watts.

The Standing Committee in 1974 (Chair Peter Freitag, Secretary David Deeley of LPO, Treasurer Simon Knott, and Allan Clegg, Paul Robinson, Cyril Carr, Tony Greaves and myself) were all determined to move ALC out of LPO. Birmingham as a base was much discussed.

At this time the relationship with LPO was positively subservient. ALC requested the National Executive to be the Party's Campaign Executive

defecting and joining other groups. It was all a terrible muddle. My interest in philosophy started then. We had to give people an anchor to stop them wafting about.

"I got interested in how to run a group, too. Southport was good; they met as a caucus - they didn't call themselves a group - and they had a leader and a whip. And it worked.

"People forget that in 1962 we made 538 gains - more than we ever have since. But people didn't know what to do when they were elected and we lost most of them in 1965. They had no philosophical base, you see."

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1974-1975

for the 1975 local elections. Permission granted - providing ALC pay a servicing charge to LPO. The campaign consisted of more touring around, this time by Preston Keeling, and John Holmes of LPO.

The annual conference is held in York and, apart from 'regretting the lack of audited accounts' (to be a recurring problem over the years . . .), most of the day is spent discussing the Bains report on new management structures in local government. Nothing to get excited about.

By 1975 Preston Keeling had resigned and LPO says it is 'a period of retrenchment, and anyone who resigns will not be replaced'. David Evans became Chair - again - David Rebak joins the committee and so, too, do David Hewitt and Gordon Lishman.

Setting out the stall . . .

Standing Committee minutes show that, for the first time, Assembly is discussed for promoting ALC itself as against for policy motions. 'We should book a stall, and consider producing a pamphlet to hand round as part of a membership drive.' David Rebak offers some Liberal jewellery for sale on the stall. The minutes of the meeting following Assembly read, rather sadly, 'The leaflet lost its impact due to the quantity of paper produced by others' and 'Unfortunately the siting of the stall was not sufficiently prominent'.

The long tradition of ALC grumbling about its stall space had started . . . The jewellery didn't sell, either. A minute reads, 'David Rebak to be paid £250 for the jewellery. It will sell for £470 to constituencies and individuals'. On what basis was such an exact projection worked out?

ALC also decided it was time to produce a set of standing orders covering its annual elections - and no wonder. A minute reads, 'After discussion, Mr Strutt's self nomination was accepted' - we don't hear of him again - and 'Mr P. Freitag was nominated despite irregularities'. Minutes were respectful in those days, and everyone was always referred to as Mr., Mrs. or Miss.

Despite all this, 1975 was a year of growth and change. David Evans produced a report on links with the MPs and Alastair Michie and Simon Hebditch were appointed the link men. This bore fruit. Cyril Smith promised support and agreed that ALC should be consulted over the party political broadcast before local elections. ALC was not

... but ALC went to sleep during campaign . . .

15th June 1973

Dear Member, Association of Liberal Councillors

The A.L.C. is back in business.

During the long run-up to this year's local elections, its activities were virtually suspended. Its officers were deeply involved in local election campaigns, and L.P.O. was fully committed to the demands of the national campaign.

Now we are getting going again. The Party's Administration Board has time to help that I should devote.

The regular publication of the A.L.C. Council Bulletin will be resumed as soon as possible.

... but now awake, is really encouraging people to be Councillors . . . Bulletin Dec. 1974.

two councils, the District, con-gratulations and newly elected councillors and good luck in what I feel will become an increasingly difficult task, the restrictions on council spending and general economic position cannot possibly make the job of being a councillor anything but unenviable.

... or, anyway, read a lot.

A.L.C. BULLETIN A.L.C. BULLETIN
JUN 1974 EDITION

PAGE 1. Election Results
PAGE 2. RATES: Paper By Braintree Liberal Cllrs.
PAGE 4. Statement on Rate Support Grant by A.M.A.
PAGE 4. A.L.C. Statement on Neighbourhood Councils
PAGE 8. Local Government Re-Organisation - Ealing Liberals Paper.
PAGE 10. NEIGHBORHOOD Councils - Cllr. Francis Butler.
PAGE 11. Neighbourhood Councils - EVIDENCE Sent to D.O.E. By National Assoc of Local Councils.
PAGE 13. About the Members Page.
PAGE 14. Housing Conference.

Action with the ALC

always consulted . . . another traditional annual grumble had started.

That year's Conference at Chelmsford was more interesting, too. There were speeches by Jeremy Thorpe and Cyril Smith, a mock Council meeting and Maggie Clay made a presentation on housing. She was introduced, up on a stage, as the star of inner city campaigners, looking very young and somewhat nervous. 60 delegates attended - interestingly the same proportion of the membership as attends ALC conferences today.

1975 also saw the beginning of ALC training as we know it now. Much of it was (and is) based on role-play. Would-be Liberal Councillors would plot a major motion to Council, only to be faced with Gordon Lishman (who else?) as relentless Chairman, anxious for his lunch, moving on to the next agenda item. Other participants were faced with unhelpful, pofaced Officers. 'The land in question is Glebe land', said Jim Heppell, with no further explanation. Gordon and David Hewitt travelled to Birmingham, Leeds, Canterbury, Gloucester and Wells. Training income for that year was £273.50 - second only to subscriptions. (I tagged along with Gordon and David, learning, and became the peripatetic trainer for some years, devising training games and exercises as I went along.)

Re-vamping the Bulletin

But probably the single most important change in 1975 was that Tony Greaves took over editing the ALC Bulletin, and North West Community Newspapers (Directors: Gordon Lishman, John Smithson, John Cookson and Michael Steed) printed it. The editor and printers were now away from London; it is the beginning of the independence Richard Wainwright had hoped for back in the late 1950s.

His first Bulletin included a case-study in victory - in Barnoldswick, Lancashire. This was all part of a determination to encourage people by publicising winners. Remember Tony leaping up onto platform at Assembly after Assembly to announce the latest by-election results, to wild cheers for the smallest Parish gain?

Despite David Evans' efforts, co-operation with the Party was going badly, and he writes in the Bulletin at the end of the year, 'We are getting virtually no effective support from LPO so you had better get used to the idea that it is going to be a do-it-yourself campaign . . . there is no direct



Gordon Lishman, always around, in different guises. An architect of the community politics resolution, travelling organiser, policy director, ALC constitution-writer, ALC trainer, member of ALC standing committee, director of Hebden Royd Publications. (Photo, circa 1980).

David Hewitt canvassing the rural vote, presumably, or training?



Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1975-1976

mailing to constituencies . . . a campaign sheet is supposed to have been issued . . .'

Doing-it-yourself had caught on. Bulletin reproduces, for the first time, a Focus (Common Hill Ward, Wimbledon). A newsletter swap shop is started. The Action page included stories from Harvey Smith, David Morrish, Maurice Bennet, Trevor (Dorchester) Jones, Bill Marsh and Francis Butler. The pressure on members to become active is building up. 'I am not renewing membership owing to pressure of work on two Councils', wrote someone, unhelpfully.

By March 1976 irritation with LPO was clear from the Standing Committee minute reporting that ALC was still unable to obtain a list of Council candidates from John Holmes . . . this was 6 weeks before polling day. (Through the following years, the complex relationship between ALC and LPO follows a cyclical pattern: rage, frustration and despair, followed by withdrawal - then co-operation, interdependence, and gratitude, until rage, frustration etc.)

The Council election results in 1976 were very poor. So poor that doubts began to set in. Were ALC on the right track? Did the 'community politics' approach mean electoral disaster? or, at the very least, have no bearing on success?

The ALC Conference in 1976 was held in Manchester. David Evans announced he wanted to resign. Trevor (Dorchester) Jones was approached by Gordon Lishman, David Hewitt and Tony Greaves and asked to stand as Chair. I was given the job of talking to him into it on the long car journey back to Dorset. He was leader of a Council group, had a young family, no time, and, well, yes, alright. He fought an election for the post, and won.

At his first Standing Committee meeting, it was resolved to try and appoint staff - and to purchase some Liberal Councillor badges to sell. This second item was not as minor as it sounds. It was the first sign of the entrepreneurial spirit which was to establish ALC as a successful mail-order outfit. Learning the dreadful lesson of Liberal Publications Department's bad debts from Liberals, and their constituency associations, ALC, from the beginning, asked for the money before they sent the goods.

That meeting also noted that the jewellery was still unsold.

At the same time, Trevor took up the battle that David Evans had started. ALC's report to the National Executive in November said, 'continued

The first art-work sheet, appended to Bulletin No 3, 1976. War on Waste was the first single-issue campaign, instigated and run by Jon Waller.



Interview . . . Interview . . .

Trevor Jones
Chair, ALC 1976 - 1985
Chair, Hebden Royd
Publications 1985 -

"I became Chair of ALC as a complete outsider. I'd had no involvement with the Party at a national level at all. As I got involved, early on, I couldn't understand why the Party operated the way it did - endless committees and apparently unable to make decisions. Amazed, too, at the way the staff were treated

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absence of administrative support from LPO . . . ALC now has 650 members . . . we seek a grant of £1,000 . . . the credibility of the Party is at stake . . . 130 County Councillors are seeking re-election in 1977.' Then, in Trevor's inimitable style - a sort of written rhetoric - 'This Party is nothing unless it fights and wins elections for public office. MPs and Councillors . . . the latter must be given the same degree of recognition and support as is normally given to the former.' (It wasn't until 1984 that the Party gave that recognition by altering its constitution to entitle Councillors - like MPs - to elect representatives to the National Executive and Party Council.)

By December, the Standing Committee decided it could appoint a travelling organiser, part-time, if they had the money. Andrew Ellis was prepared to do it for £250, plus £200 expenses. The head of LPO, Hugh Jones, attended the meeting. He must surely have been impressed by ALC's attention to financial detail. It was a matter for the Committee to decide whether or not to re-order some headed notepaper.

The editorial of the final Bulletin that year was written by Trevor. It announced that the Party has asked ALC to oversee and co-ordinate the 1977 County Councils campaign - but Trevor isn't satisfied. 'We are waiting for financial resources to put planning into action . . . nothing happened yet.'

The same Bulletin includes the first sales list: 'Community Politics Guide' by Gordon Lishman, 'Tenants' Co-operatives' by Donald Gorrie, 'The Bluffer's Guide to Politics' by Michael Meadowcroft and 'The Adur Story' by Peter Bartram. This was the first real ALC publication, edited by Tony Greaves, printed by NWCN and sold for profit. Also for sale were the Councillors' badges, plus the jewellery which is still waiting to raise the expected £470.

Into the Birchcliffe Centre

On December 20th 1976 Trevor received an amazing letter, completely out of the blue. It is from the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust Limited in York. It starts, charmingly, 'Dear Mr Jones, You possibly know of this Trust which is the only substantial non-charitable Trust in the United Kingdom . . .' The third paragraph reads, 'Recently we have received suggestions for supporting regional groups of Councillors. It has occurred to

like civil servants and discouraged from taking part in any political activity. I took the opposite view and, despite a great deal of pressure and advice, decided ALC should employ committed political activists. It wasn't easy. We had to establish a completely new sort of working arrangement between staff and elected officers. But we did, and that is what I am proud of . . . ALC created a new type of political organisation by employing political people who were also accountable to elected officers. It meant we could take decisions - it was Tony's and my style to phone each other every two or three days, agree what had to be done, and do it. We knew what was acceptable to the Standing Committee. We were very matter of fact and practical in our dealing with the Rowntree Trust, too, and that helped.

"As an outsider I had an idea of what other outsiders wanted. I remember reading the first draft someone had written for our first ALC booklet, 'Could you be a Liberal Councillor?'. It was very worthy and wordy. This is all wrong, I thought, and rang Tony. 'Let's do it as a series of questions and answers . . . what people want to know is things like How much Time will it Take? What will it cost me? and Will I have to Make Speeches?'. And that is how it was written. It set the style for ALC booklets. We broke with the past; it was a new sort of political guide, short and practical.

"What a debt we all owe to Sir Trevor Jones. He fired us all with the basic enthusiasm necessary in 70/71. He was everywhere, all at once, doing everything with that immense energy. He was larger than life . . . remember that white Triumph Stag turning up all over the place, with loud hollers on top and stuffed to the roof with leaflets?

"ALC's difficulty now is in finding people who are willing to serve the Party at national level. We've told everyone to get stuck in locally and can't get them out now to help shape the Party and ALC at the top. They don't want to go to meetings in London . . . or anywhere else. I don't know what the answer to that is."

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1977

1977

Richard Wainwright MP and Trevor Jones outside The Birchcliffe Centre, ten years ago, when ALC moved in.



Richard Wainwright retired MP writes:

"With regard to Birchcliffe, I would stress that the acquisition of this huge Chapel and Sunday School arose from the highly decentralised structure of the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust, which had a trustee (Cllr, David Shutt) living in the same valley as Hebden Bridge. The Trust bought and converted this large property as an act of decentralisation, to offer pressure groups and the like a firm base 200 miles from both London and Edinburgh.

"Since Pratap Chitnis and I were responsible for setting up the Liberal Party Local Government Department in the late 1950s, and since we were both Rowntree Trustees, we were able to organise a warm welcome to Birchcliffe for the ALC . . . This could not have happened if ALC had not been an independent organisation.

"When I was responsible for local government in LPO, I concluded that the ALC's only hope was to become a 'membership organisation', financed

my Trustees that, rather than making several grants to individual regions, we ought to investigate the possibility of making a single grant to enable some form of national service to be provided, and I have been asked to approach the Association of Liberal Councillors with this in mind.' The letter is signed by Pratap C. Chitnis, Chief Executive.

No time was lost in arranging a meeting between Trevor and the fairy godmother, and, unbelievably, in January 1977, the Rowntree Trust offered £2,750 a year for two years, plus accommodation in the newly converted chapel in Hebden Bridge. LPO also came forward with the requested £1,000.

It is all go: Andy Ellis is appointed as travelling organiser, the post of Organising Secretary is advertised, Trevor meets David Steel to discuss the MPs' input into the coming elections.

We expect to field 1,500 County Council candidates - twice as many as in 1973. The relationship with LPO has swung round - LPO asks ALC for a list of candidates and Tony sends out the first of the familiar reply sheets to get the information. The April Bulletin announces that Tony Greaves is appointed Organising Secretary and that ALC has offices in the Birchcliffe Centre.

The Lib-Lab Pact was dominating the political scene. On May 5th, 183 defending Liberals lost their County Council seats and out of 1,500 candidates only 80 were elected - of which only 23 were gains. Liberals were totally cleared off 17 County Councils. It was a terrible night. People felt numb with shock.

Tony Greaves, in presumably his first report to the National Executive as ALC's Organising Secretary, was trenchant in his views. In writing of the scale of the disaster, he said, 'A lot of Liberal Councillors and candidates did everything that could be expected of them, and everything that has been asked in recent years in terms of keeping in touch, community campaigning, local organisation etc. They lost because there were national things going on completely beyond their control. The party at a national level must accept its responsibility for this . . . There is a limit to how long committed, active workers can go on being thrashed without giving up . . . I hope the party at National level is aware of the danger.'

In his report to *Liberal News*, Tony picked out some of the winners and some of the losers. Gryffydd Evans held his seat, as did (among others) Tony himself, Chris Greenfield, Heather Swift, Beth Graham, Chris Bradford, David Morrish, Eric

Action with the ALC

Robinson, Jack Ainslie; Kathy King, Janice Lennon, Andy Ellis, David Rogers all gained seats, and Tony wrote of some of the losers, 'ALC Chair David Evans lost, Francis Butler of Sheffield lost, Adur's Peter Bartram lost, outstanding community politicians like Phoebe Winch, Elizabeth Wilson and Gordon Payne lost.'

The theme of that year's Conference was 'What went wrong? What can we do about it?' There was also a variety of workshops - Town Hall Politics with Michael Meadowcroft, Community Campaigning with Maggie Clay, Andy Ellis on Inner Cities, Stuart Mole on Liberal Groups, Nuts and Bolts with Flair by Peter Chegwyn 'and others'. This is the first appearance of 'and others', meaning 'we haven't got it sorted out, yet'.

Tony actually started work in the Birchcliffe Centre once the local elections were over. It wasn't, yet, the ideal office.

Tony recalls, 'The building was an empty, dirty, dusty shell. The chapel was still a chapel up to the roof (no floor upstairs) with a balcony round. We were billeted in a small Sunday School classroom, where ALC now has a printing room. It was small, but adequate for our needs. For over a year we were surrounded by building work . . . an amazing crane came up the side street and winched large steel pillars, massive girders etc in to form the floor for the upstairs hall.'

ALC had nothing of its own. The Standing Committee discussed buying a filing cabinet, and has anyone a spare table? Calder Valley Liberals lent one - and a chair to go with it. Very fortunately, the Post Office decided to change their colour regulations that year and David Hewitt, who worked for them, found a filing cabinet which was 'surplus to their requirements'.

The great drive for membership was on. A graph was laid out in the Sunday School classroom, and the upward trend was marked in, week by week, and reported to Trevor. A network of contacts was built up, by-passing LPO, the regions or the constituencies.

The summer wore on. In August, at the Ladywood Parliamentary by-election, the Liberal candidate came fourth - after the National Front - with only 465 votes.

So ALC got stuck in - to use a Greaves phrase. Membership passed 500. Tony planned a series of new booklets. Members would be able to buy them at a discount. The first four were ready for sale at Assembly. 'Could you be a Liberal Councillor'

by subscriptions. Michael Meadowcroft, when Local Government Officer, helped to bring this about, and the Rowntree Social Service Trust, in addition to providing Birchcliffe free of charge, also made annual direct grants to ALC until it could become independent through a massive subscription income.

"I believe Birchcliffe has played, and will play, a crucial part in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the Party, and I think this decentralisation gives us a great advantage over our opponents."

Tony's first, aggressively honest, report as Organising Secretary.

Report from A.L.C. to LPO EXECUTIVE May, 1977
COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN ENGLAND, MAY 1977

"We were hammered and it wasn't our fault" - anonymous hundreds of defeated Liberal candidates.

THE SCALE OF THE DISASTER

It is difficult to understate the scale and extent of the disaster in these elections, which saw a nationwide fall in the Liberal vote of seat and every type of situation. (see Economist figures).

The Liberal Party fought on the largest over scale with some 1500 candidates in the field. 79 were elected comprising:-

seats held.....	56
gains from Tory...	6
gains from Labour	14
gains from Inds...	3
	79

Interview . . . Interview . . .

Tony Greaves
Organising Secretary 1977-85
Managing Director, Hebden
Royd Publications 1985 -

"The important thing about the 1970 Eastbourne resolution on Community politics was that it gave a legitimacy to what people wanted to do anyway. In the early seventies, the idea was to set up a local government

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1977



The first two trestle-table Assembly stall. Trevor, myself, and Tony, selling. Note the first sun-burst symbol on a T-shirt, and more bath towels for sale, than literature. It was a great success - takings were £487.

by Trevor Jones and Tony Greaves, 'Casework - How to Cope' by Elizabeth Wilson, 'Community Politics Manual' by Gordon Lishman and John Smithson and 'Parish Politics' by myself.

Maggie Clay was elected as Secretary. Trevor was re-elected as Chair and David Hewitt was re-elected as Treasurer for the third year running. Colin Rosensteel was asked to be ALC's Party Council 'whip' - and has done the job, as a member of Standing Committee, ever since.

Trevor, incensed by a summer of writing letters and reports to everyone - David Steel, the National Executive, the General Election Committee, the Chairman of the Party, Regional Chairmen - and getting no response except suggestions that it was someone else's business to get the party off the ground again (the base Liberal vote was around 5%), issued a press release on the eve of Assembly in Brighton. He called on Steel 'to stop the rot in Liberal support. We don't want to rock the boat, just stop it sinking.'

The media had a field day. ALC was national news. David Steel was less than pleased, and subsequently had pressing engagements which for some time prevented him meeting ALC, despite numerous requests.

Despite some ALC members' criticism of Trevor's outburst, Brighton was a huge success for ALC. Liberal News carried a long article on 'The ALC at Brighton'. It wrote, 'Five crowded-out meetings are quite a record for Assembly fringe. It looks as though they really do have what many active Liberals want - soundly based experience that is clearly explained and interestingly presented. ALC Chairman, and full time organiser T. Greaves, have seized an initiative that the rest of the Party will find hard to match'.

One of the two stars at that Assembly was David Rogers on 'How we won St. Nicholas Ward in Brighton' (he was one of the two people in the whole country who gained a seat from the Tories that May) and the other star was David Penhaligon on 'How we won Truro'. Admittedly, he won it in 1974 but he was a winner and people were avid to hear about winning. The meeting was packed out.

By October, the tide was beginning to turn. There were Council by-election gains in Southend and Eastbourne, and Roger Hayes and Bert Howe gained seats from the Tories in the Isle of Wight, where Peter Chegwyn had taken over as agent.

Tony started the by-election service, asking

Action with the ALC

to the standing committee. And the first job to do was to build up a base of members. We were the first people to appeal directly to ward members, telling them to do it themselves, and not wait to work through their constituencies or regions. Membership was all important. We had this chart up in the classroom and watched the graph rise, week by week.

"The first message to get across was You Can Win . . . and to give publicity to those who did - like David Rogers who won St Nicholas Ward in Brighton from the Tories in 1977. You Can Win was a survival message then.

"The second message was that these wins were from techniques based on principles. This was quite new - in Ted Wheeler's day, the idea was that if you got the organisation right, and the policies right, then everything would be OK.

"In the early days of ALC we never got involved in policy. We used to think it wasn't

our job to interfere in what elected Councillors actually did on the Council. Then we realised it was time we looked at it because suddenly people were getting elected, and might make a mess of it. We produced the first Action Programme as a policy document for local elections.

"So the third message was about how to work as a Council group.

"Our relationship with the Party has changed a lot because most of the Party officers and Party employees now are practical people and in touch with the needs of the Party - most of them have been Councillors. A lot of the Area Agents are practical, and see the need for working on the PPCs, and the need for integrated Parliamentary and local campaigning.

"It was only fairly recently we realised that most elected Councillors turned out to be on the radical wing of the Party on national issues. We had no idea. It was no ALC plot that they turned out to be like that."



HEBDEN BRIDGE

Hebden Bridge is aptly called the Pennine Centre, for well within a 20 mile radius of this small, lively mill town are not only two national parks - the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales - but also the City centres of Leeds and Manchester.

It is at the heart of an area of great contrasts; of wild lonely moors, deep wooded valleys and bustling little towns. An area packed with history and character, the cradle of the first industrial revolution.

THE BIRCHCLIFFE CENTRE

Formerly a Baptist Chapel and Sunday School - built in 1898 and one of the largest and most magnificent of its time - the Birchcliffe Centre is the result of an imaginative conversion, providing comfortable residential accommodation, the splendid Main Hall, seminar rooms and offices. It is situated on the hillside overlooking Hebden Bridge, only five minutes' walk from the town centre, and has a car park adjacent.

PENNINE HERITAGE

The Birchcliffe Centre is run by Pennine Heritage Ltd., a registered charity established by people from the Yorkshire and Lancashire Pennines to assist the social and economic regeneration of the area. One of the aims of Pennine Heritage is to encourage both residents and visitors to gain a better understanding of the unique history, character and traditions of the area, which should lead to a greater concern for its future.

Today's brochure for The Birchcliffe Centre.

Rage, frustration and despair . . .



WAITING FOR ACTION

Ever since the disaster of last May's County Council elections, the ALC has been attempting to get some action at national level to try and prevent another debacle next May. It will not be easy to reverse our electoral decline, but there are some things which could and should be done by the Party. They have not so far been done, and they will almost certainly not now be done in time, if at all.

Two papers from the ALC have been presented to the National Executive, with suggestions for practical things to be done by various sections of the Party. These papers have received scant consideration, being deferred from one meeting to another. The National Executive of the Party is a shambles and disgrace. It has done nothing at all since last May of any use to Councillors, or to the people fighting elections. The meetings consist of people riding hobby horses and of aimless chatter. It is a useless and pathetic body.

Attempts have also been made, principally at the Assembly, to alert the Leadership of the Party to the reality of our electoral decline and to the need for clear guidance from them as to when we might be able to attract votes and how we might be able to attract them. We are still waiting.

The ALC will continue to expand its services to Councillors, and to activists and candidates. But we could do so much more, and be so much more effective, if the party at national level was prepared, willing and able to take the action necessary if the decline of this party is to be halted.

Trevor Jones

Chairman and NEC Representative
Association of Liberal Councillors

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1978

"practical things to be done . . ." The first booklets produced by ALC.

NEW BOOKLETS

The first four Campaign Booklets were ready for the Assembly:

COULD YOU BE A LIBERAL COUNCILLOR? by Trevor Jones and Tony Greaves, 20p. No.1.

CASEWORK - HOW TO COPE AND STAY SANE! by Elisabeth Wilson, 20p. No. 2.

PARISH POLITICS by Phoebe Winch, 20p. No. 4.

COMMUNITY POLITICS MANUAL by John Smithson, 25p. No. 5.

In addition, the **COUNCILLORS TAX GUIDE** by David Shutt has been published, and like the others has already been a great success.

The next batch (which includes some which we first hoped to have ready for Brighton) will be published in November and December. They will be:

No. 3: **TACTICS FOR COUNCILLORS**, to be edited by Trevor Jones.

No. 6: **HOW TO PRODUCE FOCUS**, to be produced by Tony Greaves.

No. 7: **COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS**.

No. 9: **HOUSING CAMPAIGN BRIEFINGS**, which are being edited by Tony Greaves & Margaret Clay.

Number 8 - **HOW TO FIGHT AND WIN LOCAL ELECTIONS** - will be published as early as possible in the New Year.

Colin Rosentiel, member of the standing committee since 1976 and Janice Kerouac - looking for ALC ballot papers? or Colin's sub?



people to send their results and forthcoming election details direct to him. (It had been tried earlier in the year, via the regions, but hadn't worked.)

Stuart Mole was asked if he would be the Parliamentary link person. He replies 'I'm flattered. I await instructions, seals of office etc.'

Membership was just over 700. ALC's income for the year was £5,122 (including £1,600 from the JRSST and £1,000 from LPO. Takings from sales at the Assembly were £487.

The jewellery hadn't shifted. After much discussion, it was agreed to offer it to the Women's Liberal Federation for cost price plus 20%.

1978 was a year of building for the future. Janice Kerouac became the second member of staff, as a part-time administrative assistant to Tony. Gradually her hours were increased to full time. Her amazing efficiency was a key factor in the expansion of ALC. She enabled Tony to spend much of his time travelling - spreading the word on how to campaign, making contacts and members in County Durham, Norwich, Cleveland, Kent, Devon, Cornwall, Bury and the West Midlands. Members of the Standing Committee travelled too, training, selling literature and spreading the message with almost evangelical fervour. It was needed; at the Lambeth Parliamentary by-election the Liberal candidate got only 5% of the vote.

Cyril Smith headed the local election team, and exhorted the readers of *Liberal News* to 'Get Cracking Now.' The results were reported as the best for four years - gained 33, held 58 but lost 51. The Tower Hamlets winners were hailed as 'The Magnificent Seven', but Tony warned readers, 'Let's not get carried away'. Also that May the Liberals were back in charge of Liverpool, the Richmond success story had started and Maggie Clay was elected to Leeds City Council after 5 years of campaigning.

The ALC Conference was full of 'how to' sessions: how to canvass; how to run polling day; how to do off-set printing; how to recruit candidates. Cyril Smith was the star speaker, along with David Alton and Eric Flounders.

Assembly, too, is a success, and the gamble of hiring a ballroom for the big meeting paid off. It was packed out - the theme, 'How to Fight Elections and Win'. It was eight years since (Sir) Trevor Jones had packed a meeting called 'How to Win Elections'.

Action with the ALC

The sun-burst logo first appears in the Bulletin in a reproduced Focus from Mike Oborski in Kidderminster. This logo had originated with a Pendle printer who was using it for an advertisement for 'Pendle Travel Ltd.'. Philip Berry, at the printers for his County Council campaign literature, lifted the logo and put the word Vote inside. Mike Oborski matched it up with the 'Liberal Action' badge.

Membership showed an astonishing increase of 52%. The income for the year was £7,133 (Rowntree Trust £2,750, LPO £1,000) and sales income had expanded to over £1,500. Part of the rise in the sales income was due to Tony, ever a salesman with an eye for a captive market, hiring a 'special trolley' for his wares to push up and down the corridor of the special train David Hewitt had organised from Euston to Blackpool for the Special Assembly on the Lib-Lab pact.

No success with the jewellery. It is offered again to the WLF - this time for only £200. They were not interested.

By 1979 there were two new political problems. One was the need for support for groups on Councils who had power or influence, although Maggie Clay was not appointed political secretary until 1980; the other was the need to integrate local campaigning with national issues.

Both of these were apparent following the general/local election of May 1979. As expected, the public had stuck with their traditional vote for their MPs but had, in surprising numbers, voted Liberal for their local Councillors. (The dual counts had been emotional affairs in most places. The general election counts had taken place first: all was lost, the Party was wiped out. Then, as the local counts took place, a different picture emerged - the sun was still shining after all.) We were the largest opposition parties in Richmond and Wyre Forest, we held the balance of power in Aberdeen - everywhere, new Councillors had been elected.

But would support for Liberal Council groups, once elected, solve the problem? A Bulletin editorial in late 1979 said, 'ALC are making advance preparation to help Liberals who get into influential positions on County Councils in May 1981'.

The Bulletin, now flying the sunburst logo, was packed with advice and pleas for help. The amazing geographical spread of members is apparent from one Help page: Gareth Harper from Twickenham and Eric Flounders from Tower Hamlets ask about

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1979-1980

14 PRINTING EXTRA

Paddy Ashdown reports:

We have been very busy in Yeovil. The printing thing has really caught on - all our Councillors have produced two leaflets in their wards; (That was by August - Ed.): one "thank-you and a first report-back."

In addition we have started four new leaflets in local wards, which have formed new branches as a result of the election. The interesting thing is that producing their own leaflet really gives a ward branch something to do (rather than knitting mittens all winter for the Spring Fair...). The wards that have produced these are all young in age and proving very active. But we have had to change our style slightly. Being very rural areas (as against Yeovil) we have discovered that it is necessary to be much less pungent. People really know each other in a rural community so one can't be quite so attacking. (I THINK - but I would be interested in comments). Personally I think some of them are a little too soft... but it's up to them.

We have expanded our print facility. Using money left over from the election (!!) we have purchased a camera and screen and print down frame. So we are now completely self-sufficient in plate-making etc - we can therefore offer a platemaking (including photographs) and printing facility for other Liberals in the South-west who want to produce leaflets. In addition we have purchased a second machine (A4 - Roto) which is situated in Yeovil and will serve the town. This gives us the facility to print A3 or A4. The new machine will primarily serve our 7 Yeovil Town Councillors. We have also bought a small guillotine. What we need now are proper premises and an array of people to work it all!

Setting-off to the House of Commons, eventually, by off-setting. Bulletin No 6, 1979.

1980

An important political step forward.

Having won, what then? That is what we have been increasingly turning our minds to since the splendid results of last May signalled the start of another Liberal upsurge. Over recent months we have been planning, dreaming and scheming, about extending our activities to cover not only how to win elections, but what to do when you have won. We are determined to do all we can to provide the necessary guidance and assistance to stop Liberal Councillors from being sucked into the Town Hall Club and assimilated into ineffectiveness. We also, of course, want to stimulate Councillors and Council Groups into battling for Liberalism week in week out in Council and in Committee.

This is a major new step forward for the ALC and it is intended to provide us with the wherewithall to enable the party to take full advantage of the advances that we expect to make at the polls this year and next. Over the lifetime of this Parliament we are likely to gain hundreds of Council seats and to be exercising real political power on more Councils than ever before in our history. The ALC is gearing itself up to handle the situation. We are no longer hauling ourselves out of the depths of defeat as we were a few years ago. Now we are heading for success and planning for power. We must handle this breakthrough properly. We intend to!

how to deal with non-active Council officers; John Dales from York asks about parking fines; Hugh Minor from Bright about conference junketting; Kate Corcoran from Ayrshire about delivering Focus to farms.

Also in 1979 Mike Oborski, a member of ALC Standing Committee, Housing Chairman of Wyre Forest, and a Hereford and Worcester County Councillor, started his 'Councillor's Diary' in Liberal News. There had been articles by Cyril Smith, Trevor Jones and Tony Greaves, of the 'Save that seat', 'Prepare Now' variety, articles analysing results and articles about specific Councils. But this was the first time a Councillor described the day-to-day life of committee meetings, Focus preparation, casework etc. All in between earning a living...

1980 is another expansion year. ALC acted to meet the political needs that had become evident in '79. The editorial in the first Bulletin is headlined 'Planning for Power'. There is also an advertisement for a political secretary. The second Bulletin carries an article by Michael Meadowcroft on Balance of Power, and the need for group standing orders is plugged.

Maggie Clay was appointed Political Secretary. Liberal News called her 'Battling Maggie'. She drove her Mini all over the country that year, advising groups and keeping up the contacts which are so essential to ALC. Maggie was able to take on full-time what Tony had had to squeeze in between other jobs. Advising, trouble-shooting, hand-holding, and often dealing with sensitive, confidential and personal problems with a Council group is time-consuming and exhausting. All the ALC staff are often Counsellors to Councillors.

May produced 'scatter gains'; it was clear that better and more up-to-date organisational guides on polling day and canvassing were needed. Most of all, it was clear that the Party lacked detailed local government policies which candidates could campaign on and which groups could implement.

I was asked to liaise with Peter Knowlson (head of Policy Division, LPO) and write a short policy booklet. There turned out to be loads of policy (127 pages in the local government report of 1962 for instance) but it was either philosophical or about what central government should do to make local government better. The resulting booklet for Council candidates turned out to be too short - indeed, almost empty of practical policies for the Council chamber. We called it 'Wot no Policy?' and circulated it at the ALC Conference in Hebden

1979

Mike was a member of ALC standing committee, Housing Chair of Wyre Forest D.C. and a County Councillor. For some reason this column written from New Orleans, USA.

Mike Oborski's diary

Highways here are a Focus editor's dream!



I ONCE heard it said, "if you ever get to Heaven you'll be able to spot the Liberal Councillors - they'll be the ones gathered around St Peter complaining about the broken paving stones."

Well, from Atlanta, across Alabama, down to New Orleans, and on to Baton Rouge and out past Lafayette isn't quite Heaven, but I know what he meant. Just because you're away from home territory you can't suddenly stop interpreting everything like a Focus writing Liberal Councillor. So here goes, Focus visits the deep South:

From Lafayette, Louisiana

The highways into New Orleans are a Focus editor's dream. The highways are a Focus editor's dream. The highways are a Focus editor's dream.

Action with the ALC

Bridge that year. We proved it couldn't be launched or published. But it had the right effect. The first Action Programme was produced by Tony Greaves, Maggie Clay, Andy Ellis and Peter Knowlson, was debated through Party Council, accepted and published in time for the County Council elections in 1981. It was, therefore, national policy. ALC was accused of centralism at the time.

ALC was also asked to brief the Party's Campaigns and Elections Committee. 'It must be geared to campaigning rather than to abstract policy and theoretical policy', wrote Tony in his report, 'e.g. keep village school open, rather than the philosophy and purpose of education in a Liberal society'.

As part of the overall plan to support elected Councillors, Maggie started to produce 'Grapevine' - a regular mailing to Council groups and their members. It gave advance news of legislation and how it would affect Councils, suggested motions, gave political briefing and, of course, had feed-back on what groups were doing successfully.

Assembly was in Blackpool and there was a commission on local government, with Trevor as Chair and Maggie as rapporteur. Part of the fringe was the odd on-and-off ALC meeting to be addressed by David Steel. It was advertised, then cancelled by David, then, at the last minute, he agreed to appear with several of his Parliamentary colleagues to 'answer questions on local government'. No-one knew quite what to make of it all.

By November there was a steady stream of by-election successes reported in the by-election diary of Liberal News.

It was agreed to drop the item on jewellery off the Standing Committee agenda. No-one knows where it is, or what it looked like (diamond rings?, cuff links?, tie pins?) or even where it had come from. Or why it was always being discussed.

Very early in 1981 the gang of four produced the Limehouse Declaration and, only a few weeks later, the Social Democratic Party was launched.*

* Author's note: There is very little mention of the SDP Councillors in this story. This may seem odd, even ungracious, as we include SDP Councillors in our charts and statistics of election results under the broad heading 'Alliance', because most of the Liberal and SDP Councillors act as 'Alliance' groups. Many SDP Councillors are now well established and making a valuable contribution in their areas. But the ALC and the Association of Social Democratic Councillors are separate organis-

Question posed . . .



ALC Conference at The Birchcliffe Centre. Richard Wainwright speaking.



Question answered . . .



ALC are responding to the growing and persistent demand from Liberal Councillors and ALC members for help with local policy. People want to know how Liberal policies and values can be applied at local level - to those areas where Councils have the power to do something about them.

Hence GRAPEVINE (see page 2), hence WOT NO POLICY? (see page 2), and hence the decision to produce a national ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE COUNTIES - an action oriented 'manifesto' for next May's polls.

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1981

And another political need is met. Bulletin No 3, 1980.



ations and I have not asked to see their records or documents.)

The first Bulletin of 1981 had a front page article by David Steel, 'A Call to Action'. Also in that Bulletin was the first mention of The Social Democrats, 'What To Do When You Find One . . .' The word 'smother' was as much quoted out of context as Cyril Smith's 'strangle'.

Social Democrats took up a lot of discussion time that summer, particularly at the very successful ALC Conference in Hereford. Viv Bingham and Richard Holme were invited to explain to members what they had been up to, and the background to 'A Fresh Start for Britain' (the leaflet with David and Shirley sitting on the grass). The County Council elections had been the best for 'half a century', the Liberals had won Croydon and the SDP had won Crosby. The mood was ebullient.

Tony Greaves wrote in the Bulletin, 'There is now a prospect, unknown for most living members of the Party, of a large Parliamentary Party. It is vital to get PPCs who make good campaigning MPs. Get yourself an activist whether he wears a pin-stripe or jeans. Look to your local Councillors.' He also wrote a report for the National Executive. 'It is essential there are no 'dummy' candidates. We know this from experiencing this year's huge problem of balance of power in eight counties. It is a full-time job for Maggie Clay . . .'

At the Llandudno Assembly the Alliance was endorsed. The ALC put forward an amendment asserting the distinctive nature of liberalism which Trevor and Tony thought was very controversial. In fact, Alan Beith, the mover of the main motion, accepted the amendment gladly.

Also at Assembly a special general meeting was called for ALC members, because the Treasurer reported that two years' accounts had been stolen with his briefcase. John Smithson became Treasurer at an on-the-spot election. David Hewitt had managed ALC's budget from the days when ALC's budget was somewhat less than that of an affluent constituency, to an annual income of £23,000 - he had also helped build up the membership to over 1,000.

During that year I started writing a column for Liberal News based on the hundreds of Focus-type leaflets which members sent to the Birchcliffe Centre. They were bundled up and posted to me in Bristol. They gave a good picture of what ordinary Liberals up and down the country were



The Parliamentary Party talking to ALC at Blackpool, 1980.

1981

doing, trying to get started, trying to get elected, trying to communicate once they were elected. Someone wrote in complaining that they and their doings were never mentioned. I wrote (I am sorry to quote myself but it says something crucial about the role of ALC then, and today) 'ALC is about sharing - sending in examples of Focuses, press cuttings etc. We learn from each other by sharing our successes and failures. But we only know about what you bother to tell us, and we can only write about those who share their news...' Mentions in the column proved a useful boost to Liberals around the place. Margaret Goldstone, from Guildford, wrote, 'We'd resigned ourselves to being somehow incapable of producing anything of which ALC would approve... nice to know someone somewhere appreciates us.'

By the autumn of 1981, it was clearly time to expand the staff. Tony wanted to relinquish editing the Bulletin, Maggie was travelling all the time sorting out Council groups and writing 'Grapevine' and Janice, now full-time, was membership secretary and financial administrator. ALC advertised for a Development Secretary and for Political Advisers, who, for decent expenses, would be prepared to weigh in with help, post May. It was not only ALC staff who were over-worked. Maggie wrote about the problems of Councillors having to do too much ward work.

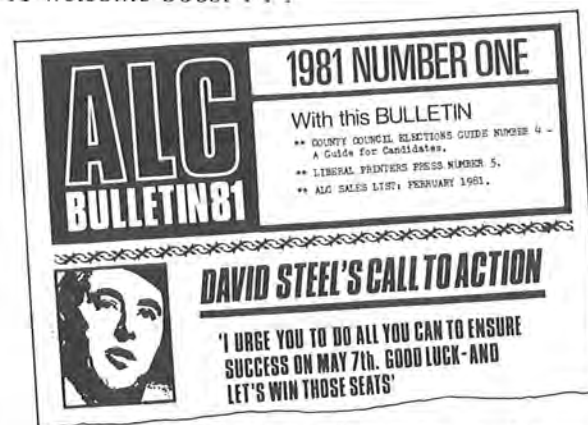
By now, though, ALC is all too aware of the problems of getting elected without due preparation. Councillors' training schools are planned and Maggie wrote, 'If you think you are likely to be in balance of power, write to ALC and get invited to a seminar in your area. PLAN FOR IT.' The Liberal News reported that we were on a 'crest of a wave'.

In fact, the May results of 1982 were disappointing - half as many gains (200) as forecast.

Jeremy Shaw was appointed Development Secretary and took over editing the Bulletin.

The Conference was in Chester and 200 delegates attended. The SDP was still being discussed - but at a practical level. The discussion was on 'Local Elections and the SDP - Tactics for Liberals', which had produced apoplexy from some members of the Liberal establishment, as the press gleefully quoted sentences out of context. But it fulfilled a genuine need. Liberals were baffled by negotiating who would fight which ward, especially in wards where they had been focussing, and campaigning, and doing casework for months, even years.

A welcome boost...



But this page 3 creates a furore



Tony Rounthwaite, also a new Northamptonshire Councillor, similarly explains the situation to his electorates, under the heading "Sorry." He is... "liberals" negotiations in the council... "sary meetings meant the... "problem..."

The column appeared fortnightly for eighteen months. Richard Winch took it over towards the end.

1982

Thank You, Tony

Phoebe Winch (Bristol) writes:

In a mere thirty-eight words, Tony Greaves casually mentioned that he would no longer be editing the ALC Bulletin. His amazing achievement as Editor deserves more recognition than his own modest paragraph.

There cannot be many of us who can actually measure his achievement - you have to have been around long enough to remember the pre-Tony era when the ALC was just another "body" (as the Constitution so elegantly puts it) instead of the powerful political force it is today.

Tony's first Bulletin was produced at the beginning of 1975. This was two years before he became Organising Secretary; it was a year before Trevor Jones became Chairman; ALC was still at LPO which was still at 7 Exchange Court.

It wasn't by any means the first ALC Bulletin. A few of us have kept pre-Tony issues (I can't think why). They were roneed on foolscap paper. Different coloured pages were used for "Policy Notes" or "Facts and Figures". A Bulletin in 1971 contained an extract from a speech by John Pardoe on Housing, two extracts from speeches by Richard Wainwright and a 2000-word long extract from a speech by Emyln Hooson on the Local Government Bill. There is also a long extract from the draft bill itself. The most exciting article in an issue dated 1974 is, word for word, the Evidence submitted to the Department of the Environment by the ALC on the consultative document on neighbourhood Councils.

In 1970 the Bulletin was pointing out that membership had dropped from 385 to 283 despite the recruitment of 10 new members! The situation seemed no better in 1974 - perhaps because the Bulletin says, (to newly elected Councillors) "Good luck in what I feel will become an increasingly difficult task, the restrictions on council spending and general economic position cannot possibly make the job of being a Councillor anything but unenviable."

Tony takes over, and eight years ago the new ALC style is born. A3 paper, borders, cartoons and the sunburst logo are yet to come. But his new Bulletin is in short, easy-to-read paragraphs. Is this the first time the word ACTION appeared in a headline in any Liberal publication? The imperative demands have started. "What are you doing about Housing?" Being a Councillor suddenly seems possible, even exciting, and certainly enviable. His new Bulletin

- gives the first "Case Study in Victory" (Barnolds-wick). He tells us how to win. He says "Take the initiative" and, yes, "Communicate" and ends with the now familiar cry "Get on with it!"
- Tony's first Bulletin was covered with lettraset headlines and crisply printed instead of soggyly duplicated. He commented "On the costings of this issue, it is actually cheaper than duplicating it in LPO."
- What an appalling implication - that ALC could do something more efficiently and cheaper than LPO!
- But most important, this was the first Bulletin to be our Bulletin. Instead of reprinting MPs' speeches and government circulars, Tony asked us what we wanted in our Bulletin and encouraged us to send in contributions, ideas, views. The job of sharing, caring and doing had begun. Thank you, Tony.

From Tony's last Bulletin - No 1, 1983.



David Vasmer, and David Shutt, a Trustee of the JRSST, and, among things, ALC's auditor. What is wrong with the roof of The Birchcliffe Centre?



The platform for a "Balance of Power" session at the ALC Conference. Chris Brown, Janice Lennon and Andrew Stunell explain it is nothing to worry about.

It looks innocent enough — quite helpful, in fact. The famous briefing to PPCs during the 1983 election.

GENERAL ELECTION SPECIAL CAMPAIGN MAILING

Series Editor - Bruce Galloway

ABOUT THE SPECIAL GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN MAILINGS

We thought we would produce a special CAMPAIGN MAILING for the G.E. — then the idea grew. So this will be a BRIEFING SERVICE to all Liberal Candidates. It will be sent out about three times a week until Polling Day, as a service to the Liberal Party from ALC.

The SPECIAL GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN MAILING will also be sent to all regular CM subscribers. This first issue goes to all CM subscribers; after this one, you will get a "bumper bundle" at the end of each week of the G.E. campaign (unless you want it sent out as it is produced — for which we need another £2 to cover extra costs, please!)

Each issue will include: a section on the enquiries we have had — ALC's information and advice service goes on through the G.E. — please phone us. We can probably give advice on sensitive areas, as well as in the general campaigning field, which LPO might find more difficult to give at this election!

Our aim is two-fold:

- to provide Liberals with direct practical help and advice in this campaign. Artwork for leaflets and "snip and stick", practical advice, policy ammunition.
- to inject a more aggressively Liberal input to the campaign. We are not in any way seeking to undermine the Alliance — rather, to strengthen it by stressing the positive and radical Liberal elements.

We hope you find it useful. PLEASE send us copies of good material you are using so we can recycle it to other Liberals. Use what parts of the CM special you find useful. Ignore the parts you don't like!

AND PLEASE let us have your CAMPAIGN HQ address by return (or by phone). See slip on page 2.

TONY GREAVES (Org Sec, ALC)

... attack on ... on the choice of policy before them:
The differences are mainly a watering down or (occasionally) fudging — or sometimes omission — of clear Liberal policies. In one case, at least, the Alliance document is more definite and clear than the Liberal one — that of trades union reform.

'TREASON' ATTACK BY STEEL

By GRAHAM PATERSON, Political Staff

MR STEEL, the Liberal Leader, has angrily denounced "sabotage" by sections of the party during the election campaign, and has warned his fellow MPs that he will not continue as leader unless the Liberals show they are seriously interested in power.

Breaking his three-month sabbatical from politics, taken to get over depression caused by a virus illness, he has written a six-page confidential letter to Liberal MPs and senior officials which bitterly attacks the behaviour of parts of the party.

Mr Steel ...

The official statement of the strategy and policy of ALC approved by members at the Conference in 1983. It is worth reading.

It was the policy briefings, leaked to Fleet Street, that caused all the trouble ...

A leaked letter from David Steel adds to the furore.

... meeting ... when only ... outside Left Labour ... attended? Who is bothering ... check what is happening inside ... the Young Liberals?"
Mr Steel is scarcely less complimentary about the Association of Liberal Councillors, and its leader Mr Tony Greaves, who issued a bulletin during the campaign which was critical of the direction of Alliance policies.
Mr Steel called the bulletin "unfavourable and unhelpful" and added: "The Liberal party will simply not get anywhere with such sloppiness in the next General Election."
He discloses that there was an attempt during the election campaign to stop publication of the bulletin, but Mr Greaves threatened to ...

... m ... re ... th ... th ... to ... l ... th ... wa ... pa ... pr ... v ...

1983

THE WORTHING DECLARATION

Preamble: THE ALC'S JOB

- The major roles of the ALC have evolved to include:
- a) servicing Liberal Councillors and Liberal Groups with information, ideas and advice about their work, tactics and initiatives;
 - b) promoting to Liberal Councillors, Council candidates and activists, a distinctive style of campaigning, backed by the techniques to carry it out;
 - c) supporting and advising Liberals in local government who are confronting power and its implications;
 - d) providing motivation and a sense of group identity for Liberal Councillors and activists.



And there was the question of 'labels'. What do candidates call themselves? The Alliance (with a capital 'A') had not yet emerged as a sort of third party (between the Liberal Party and the SDP) which it is today. Today, too, the media is better educated about the new style of British politics. But in 1982 the initials SDP had a media glamour and Liberal wins were being hailed as SDP victories to the annoyance of the winners, the workers — and Tony Greaves' by-election diary.

At Assembly in Brighton, the long sought after informal meeting with David Steel took place. Members of the Standing Committee were invited to his suite for discussion and sandwiches.

Meanwhile Maggie continued to travel. In the autumn of 1982 she visited Liverpool, Cheshire, Devon, Northants, Cornwall and Sussex. It was clear that, once again, the ALC staff were overburdened.

David Vasmer was appointed Campaigns and Information Officer. The filing system Tony had begun became more extensive and organised. It seemed (and still seems) that the ALC has become a sort of Citizens Advice Bureau for the entire Party, whether they were members of ALC or not. The phone rang incessantly with people wanting information about tree preservation orders, how to deal with a Council's chief executive, their election expenses, the exact wording of a bill going through its second reading in the House of Commons etc.

At the end of 1982 Tony Greaves was managing a staff of five and an annual income of £48,500 (the sales income had risen to £11,000). The JRSST and LPO gave grants of £18,500 and £6,300 respectively. The subscription for ALC had risen to £12. Standing Committee no longer discussed whether to order some new notepaper.

1983 was General Election year. The two leaders, and their manifesto writers, had to get something together as Alliance policy quickly. Many Liberals felt the result was not totally satisfactory. More importantly, ALC feared the policy briefing would not contain any campaigning material. In response to people's frustration, Tony Greaves and the late Bruce Galloway produced their own campaign mailing twice a week for all candidates. It was in part practical what-to-do-now stuff, and in part policy briefings on the differences, and similarities, between Liberal policy and the official manifesto. The result was well received by grateful candidates. But a journalist in Scunthorpe got hold of a copy, and sent it to Fleet Street. The damage was done. The cuttings tell the

story of leaks, misunderstandings and hurt feelings which resulted once the election was over. Nevertheless, seven new MPs were elected - most of them having grown up with ALC. By September, Standing Committee minutes read, 'The Greaves incident to be a closed book', and 'Archie Kirkwood and Michael Meadowcroft to be PLP liaison people'.

General elections apart, a new political problem arises. Had the membership of the ALC (and the Standing Committee) concentrated so much on the techniques of getting elected - following Tony Greaves' 'Three Cs', campaigning, communicating and concentrating - that everyone had lost sight of the original principles behind it all? How often did we all remember just what the ideas behind the much bandied-about phrase, 'community politics' were?

Gordon Lishman (who else?) said he would write a re-statement, and try to take it further as well. The resultant document was agreed by Standing Committee - it had had to be cut quite a bit - was put to members at the Conference at Worthing, and passed. Inevitably, and somewhat pompously, it became known as The Worthing Declaration. As it says, it is 'an official statement of policy and strategy by the ALC'.

But, at Worthing, the Worthing Declaration was overshadowed by yet another discussion on the SDP. This proved more positive than previous Conference debates. Tony produced a paper which used the catchy phrase 'organic merger', which described not only what members knew was happening on the ground, but what (as a result of a vote) members hoped would happen - merger from the grassroots up and not by dictate from above. The Conference also decided to hold a poll of members as to whether SDP members should be encouraged to become associate members of ALC. It was agreed.

At Assembly in Harrogate that year, the Party held a topical resolution on Party Strategy. The ALC made a lengthy submission which received some press attention. The resulting motion, moved by William Wallace, included a reaffirmation of the Party's commitment to community politics, and a pledge to integrate campaigning 'within Parliament and outside, within local authorities, at national level and within each local community...'. The motion goes on to reaffirm the alliance with the Social Democratic Party, but requests greater involvement of the members of both parties in joint policy making.

Part 3: MOVEMENT OR ALLIANCE

We believe that the future role of the Liberal Party must be as the core of a political movement. Liberal Councillors and activists supported by the ALC are involved locally with many pressure groups and single interest groups; many more are committed to particular interests. This commitment will increase. Nationally we will pursue a committed and long-term involvement with such groups. A major job for the Liberal Party should be to work with and represent them. The growth of pressure groups in which people are organising to influence the existing power structure, and often to solve problems directly themselves, is a very important element in the breaking up of traditional politics which we welcome.

The emergence of the SDP is just one aspect of that process. We see the future of the Liberal Party as being much more than just an alliance with another party to gain support in the traditional way.

The reactions in The New Statesman.

Liberal activists

MEDIA concentration on Cyril Smith's elephantine flouncing concealed the most important change at the Liberals' Harrogate Assembly. This was the changed balance of power in the reinvigorated Liberal Party. It has shifted from the London-based party leadership in the Houses of Parliament (and the Liberal Party Organisation at the National Liberal Club) to the grassroots community politicians centred on the Association of Liberal Councillors, organised by Tony Greaves from Hebdon Bridge.

The behaviour of the still below-par David Steel at Harrogate demonstrated how the tables have turned. When still depressed by his virus infection, Steel (in his ill-judged private letter in August to fellow Liberal MPs) had vented his wrath about Greaves's disloyalty to the Alliance during the election.

On arriving at Harrogate, however, it became clear to Steel and other leaders that Greaves was the hero of the June election to most delegates, particularly to the candidates, like Michael Meadowcroft and Paddy Ashdown, who had won and the many more who had come close seconds. His ALC had come up trumps in providing them with election materials, in contrast to the laggardly Liberal Party HQ in London. Candidates who had built up their votes with ALC support were anxious to deepen this 'community politics' approach.

The Party leadership did an immediate U-turn. Instead of flaying Greaves, as expected by the media, Steel was persuaded to meet him more than half way. The resolution on Party strategy was transformed into a document of almost unconditional surrender to the ALC. It called for the conversion of the Liberals into a 'campaigning Party', in which the efforts of the previously remote Parliamentary leadership are now to be closely geared into those of community politicians. In his wind up speech on Friday, David Steel carefully avoided any challenge to the Party's grassroots radicals.

For his part, Tony Greaves played the game, avoiding the victory jig to which he was entitled. But Cyril Smith could not show any similar restraint. When the Alton-Smith plan to create a Deputy Leader to be elected by the Party membership was rejected, Smith complained it was a bloody 'fix'. With mounting fury on successive TV news shows, Cyril claimed that the jealous 'birdbrains' in the Party leadership had been afraid to hear him speak again on this subject. In fact, it would have been wiser to have allowed the Rochdale Poujadiste to speak for a third time on the deputy leadership. Every time he had spoken he lost supporters. This was a

that the proposal had more to do with providing Big Cyril with a possible power base hostile to Steel than with providing the grass roots with access to the Leadership. Liberal activists were by then confident that they will have all the access they want because, as the NS's chronicle of council by-elections continues to demonstrate, they are delivering the goods.

Andrew Roth

Liberal no surrender

Leighton Andrews, London SE15

Andrew Roth is right to stress the wider distribution of power following the Liberal Party Assembly (NS 30 September). It is also good to see the first accurate report on why the Assembly voted to have nothing to do with Cyril Smith's proposals for a Deputy Leader. But it is misleading to suggest that the resolution on Party Strategy was 'a document of almost unconditional surrender to the ALC'.

As one of those involved in drafting the resolution that was adopted, I know that there was never any doubt that a commitment to community campaigning and a closer integration between local activists and the Parliamentary Liberal Party would be carried into the motion. No one who read the submissions on strategy from all sections of the Party through the summer, or who attended any discussions on the subject, could have assumed anything other than a widespread consensus on the need to strengthen our campaigning impact. While the media pontificated about the antics of those who sought salvation in structures, the Liberal Party activists spent their time thinking through the politics.

The ALC - of which I am a member - had no need to force any 'surrender'. There was never any doubt that the strategy to which it is committed, that of community politics, would be emphatically reaffirmed by the Liberal Party, as it has been in every strategy debate since 1970. The only difference this time is that, with a number of new MPs, including several who have come through the Party rather than winning a fortuitous by-election, there is more chance of a Parliamentary spearhead.

These were not idle words. Also at that Assembly an important meeting took place in David Steel's suite between the Parliamentary Liberal Party and the Standing Committee of ALC. It was recognised that many of the misunderstandings during the General Election in May, and during the following months, had been due to lack of communication between the PLP and the ALC. With much positive goodwill on all sides, and with much help from Archie Kirkwood, Paddy Ashdown and Michael Meadowcroft (all newly elected MPs) it was agreed that there should be regular meetings between the PLP and ALC. This was an important political step forward towards the goal of 'integrated campaigning' and relations with David Steel and his colleagues have been good ever since that lunchtime meeting. The media, who had collected outside Steel's suite, hoping to see ALC walk out with their tails between their legs, were disappointed. The rumoured 'ticking off' had not occurred.

By the end of Assembly week, it was as though all the various difficulties and traumas of the summer had been resolved. A new direction had emerged and a common theme had been overwhelmingly endorsed by the Party and its MPs.

ALC continued to expand. Publications now included 15 campaign booklets, 10 action guides, 3 fund-raising manuals, an action programme (policy for local government), 17 artwork sheets, 3 plastic stickers, 12 badges, 3 Grassroot series booklets, 2 topical booklets, 2 practical briefings and 2 campaign packs.

There were 1,900 elected Councillors on principal Councils - an increase of 1,000 on 1977. We controlled six authorities and had balance of power in 20 more.

9. LIBERAL PARTY STRATEGY (Topical Commission)

We reaffirm our commitment to community politics which involves women and men in taking and using power over the decisions which affect their daily lives and to an overall campaigning strategy involving Liberals at all levels. We will work with all individuals and groups who share similar aims. We pledge ourselves from today to integrate our campaigning within Parliament and outside, within local authorities, at national level and within each local community, to resist the illiberal measures put forward by this Conservative Government and to promote the values for which we stand.

obstacles which the organisation of Parliament
→ ing on Parliament place
case, we call

The strategy motion at Assembly, 1983.

Action with the ALC

The difficulty of integrating national and local campaigning, which first became apparent in 1979, was now, at last, easier. 'Campaign Mailing', after a hiccupping two years, had really got off the ground with Peter Chegwyn editing it. At the very least, his artwork improved Focuses everywhere that his cut-out-and-stick boxes on national policies/issues/facts were used.

At LPO John Spiller had become Secretary General and he implemented the idea of Area Agents - decentralising the Party at last, along the lines of the 1973 Wainwright Report on Party re-organisation. There was also a useful meeting between Tony and John on campaigning strategy, and David Vasmer started his first single-issues campaign - on health cuts - using Liberal News as a vehicle for news of the campaign - as well as the usual briefings to members, 'Grapevine' subscribers, 'Campaign Mailing' subscribers etc. The late Charles Stainsby had taken over as editor of Liberal News and there was a marked change of style. There is even a double page spread profile of ALC at the Birchcliffe Centre which was almost embarrassingly flattering. This had no bearing on the fact that ALC started positively promoting Liberal News as a 'must' for activists.

1984 was a year of consolidation. It started well with David Steel paying a private visit to the Birchcliffe Centre. He was anxious to see ALC at home. It was a relaxed and happy afternoon. Seeing ALC at work always seems to give visitors a greater understanding of what ALC is all about - and ALC always learns something useful from the visitors.

The political advisers, to help groups after the May elections, were advertised for and appointed. Among them was Andrew Stunell who had been holding balance of power in Cheshire for 3 years. David Vasmer produced free campaign briefings on NHS cuts, housing benefits, election law, freedom of information, fish and chip VAT and Brent. Policy conferences were planned for Councillors on employment, finance, Parishes in control, housing and education.

The Standing Committee was now quite a major employer, and much of the time was spent getting to grips with this new responsibility; they discussed pension schemes and staff reviews.

David Steel came to the Conference in Sheffield and told members, 'You are the shock troops of the future'. The PLP/ALC group continued to meet, but whoever attended for ALC wrote in a report, 'The role of the group seemed unclear to many'.



Peter Chegwyn, editor of Campaign Mailing and Agent extraordinary.

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1984



Andrew Stunell, travelling advisor, apparently showing Janice Lennon his passport to the South.

In August, ALC heard that Rowntrees would no longer be giving a grant - at that time £8,000. The grant should have ceased in 1983 when the Trustees, in accordance with the terms of the Trust not to fund any organisation on a permanent basis, withdrew support from the Liberal Party as a whole. But Rowntrees, as always, were helpful to ALC, phasing out their support gradually. It was a blow, and Standing Committee felt members ought to be made aware of ALC's precarious financial position. An appeal was launched and the response from members was magnificent - more than £10,000 was raised.

ALC was now operating under its own constitution, written by Gordon Lishman (who else?). We had an elected President (a seemingly suitable job for someone the staff and officers had nicknamed 'Auntie') and a Vice-Chair (Roger Hayes, who was now not just one of our trainers but a trainer who trained trainers), Chris Willmore had been elected Secretary, and John Pigott was Treasurer. Trevor had announced that he would retire as Chair, after eight years.

Shortly before the Assembly, it was agreed with the Assembly Committee that ALC should take over the 'Assembly Gazette' (under the supervisory eye of the committee). It was a job that had driven various Liberal printers and editors to the verge of nervous breakdowns. The nearest sympathetic printer to Bournemouth was some 40 miles away, which meant an 80 mile round trip late at night for a series of cars. Having spent the day (in between all the normal Assembly activities) writing and laying out ('It's like watching 10 Focus editors simultaneously' said a slightly awe-struck Peter Knowlson), members had to collate the pages until the small hours. Was there ever an Assembly with so many faces white with fatigue? It was judged a successful venture. ALC even offered to repeat it the following year.

Liberator's 'Lymeswold Revue' was a sell-out at Assembly that year and Paul Hannon suggested the team should perform again at the National Liberal Club in aid of funds for ALC. The cast were excellent, David Steel attended, but none of the ALC 'stars' could get to London that evening - neither Tony, nor Maggie, nor Trevor. I was asked, therefore, to thank the revue stars, plus Granny Lee's jazz band, from the stage. It was my first job as President of ALC - it wasn't very successful. Later they complained that 'no-one had thanked them'.

In the autumn, Standing Committee responded to a feeler put out by LPO, as to whether ALC

1984

Interview . . . Interview . . .

Margaret Clay
Political Secretary ALC 1980-5
General Secretary 1985

"I was pitchforked into that Housing Campaign in 1976 when I had only been in the Party for two minutes, it seemed. It was very daunting. I sometimes feel the same about being General Secretary of ALC. It was difficult to follow Greaves - you can't emulate him. You have to carve out a different role which fits your style.

"A lot of my work is about staff management and there isn't anything tangible to show for that. I've had to learn to delegate. Andrew Stunell knows far more about advising Councils than I ever did, and David Vasmer knows more about campaigning than I do. I don't see myself as a wise guru in the middle. We're too big now, and I have to manage a hefty budget, too.

"We've just taken on an extra 100 square yards of office space at Birchcliffe. It is suddenly very different. If

a phone call is for me, Vicky can't just shout across the desks any more, she has to ring me and put me through on the extension. We can't talk to each other across the office any more - we have to get up and go to see each other. Believe it or not, no longer can one person make coffee for everyone who happens to be around. It makes it all much more formal. I don't know what effect it will have yet.

"The most demanding part of the job is this constant change as ALC is growing so fast. As soon as we seem settled, we take on something new.

"Yes, I do feel the tension between ALC and The Party - it's been made more confusing and frustrating by The Alliance. I think it is a result of working for four or five years with very little communication with LPO - and, prior to 1983, I wouldn't ever have known who the elected Party officers were.

"Now there is constant communication, which is obviously a good thing, but it produces its own tensions - how to work with the Party, while keeping ALC values.

Action with the ALC

would be interested in taking over the Liberal Publications Department, which had withered away to next to nothing. The minute reads, 'We'll look at the matter, and say not No, but Not Now'. (-Chris's minutes are good at giving the gist of a lengthy discussion).

The Standing Committee felt it had enough on its hands. Maggie was getting more and more sucked into advisory work on Parliamentary issues such as the Mets/GLC legislation. The LPO grant to ALC was £15,000 that year, and more and more staff time was taken up by work for the Party as a whole, rather than for the membership.

On January 1st 1985 the name D.T. Jones appeared in tiny print in the OBE column of the New Year's Honours List. As his General Election agent in 1979, I was one of the few to realise that D.T. was ALC's Trevor. The honour was for 'political service'. Just so. I, for one, was delighted by the formal recognition of his, and ALC's contribution to Liberalism.

Before Trevor handed over as Chair, he steered ALC into the next big step forward. The Not Now response to the request on Liberal Party Publications became, suddenly, NOW.

It was decided to look into ways of making the publications side a separate company from ALC, but under its wing. Both Maggie and David Vasmer had warned the Standing Committee that any other way of doing it would put severe pressure on staff. Gordon Lishman (who else?) had written a report recommending a Company limited by guarantee.

Tim Clement-Jones gets cracking and moves fast to set up the right kind of company. Tony decides to gamble his future and says he's willing to manage it (Maybe both he and ALC needed a change . . .). By late February, the National Executive agrees to go ahead, then, in March, has second thoughts (the majority of directors are to be ALC appointees). Trevor writes one of his strong letters, '... in other words, we are creating a new enterprise at no cost or effort to the Party on behalf of the Party and make money for the Party . . . you cannot now say Maybe.' And he wrote to the Standing Committee, 'We are on the verge of the biggest step forward for ALC since we took on Tony and the Birchcliffe Centre.'

In May agreement is reached with the National Executive and the ALC. The publishing venture is to be called Hebden Royd Publications Ltd.. Hebden Royd is the name of the Parish in which Hebden Bridge is the main town and, of course, the company was to be based at The Birchcliffe

"The most difficult thing to cope with is people saying that ALC is 'establishment' now. We are still radical, but I don't define radicalism as always taking on the Party leadership. People used to think that if you did that, you were somehow 'alright' as a radical. It is something much more complex and profound.

"Our radical cutting edge was perceived as being about certain ideas. The challenge is how to get over that radicalism and educate Councillors into maintaining it, and getting it into their communities. I don't think our Councillors have begun to work out how to promote a Liberal Council in a Liberal community. We have a long way to go. So much of our work is just helping them to survive.

"I'm sure the location of the Birch-

1985



Hebden Bridge — from the Heptonstall road.

publicity move

By Peter Hetherington
THIS month Tony Greaves and his radical colleagues drove a three-ton truck to London, loaded it with crates of booklets, and moved another section of the Liberal Party to new headquarters high in the Pennines. The disquiet of some party stalwarts, the Liberals' flagging publications department has been relocated in a disused Baptist chapel above the West Yorkshire town of Hebden Bridge. The building, owned by the Rowntree Trust and run by a local heritage society, is home for the Association of

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1985

cliffe Centre has influenced the style of ALC . . . both the craginess of the landscape, and the perseverance and resilience of the people up here. I'm a Southerner, but I love these valley towns with their sense of continuity and the linked industry and countryside. I nearly always pause in the car park before going down the steps into the office — just to look across at Hebden Bridge and the hills beyond.

"I have a strong sense of identity with the building itself. My mother reckoned my grandfather, who was a missionary in India, came to Birchcliffe to preach when he was home. The office is the old floor of the Baptist Chapel and it symbolises the essential link of Non-conformity and the Party. Non-conformity? Is that ALC's role within the Party?"



Trevor handing over to John Pigott as Chair of ALC? Well, Trevor is relaxing with the coffee, and John has got all the papers.

Interview . . . Interview . . .

John Pigott
Treasurer ALC 1984-5
Chair ALC 1985 -

"Most of my time is taken up with political problems within the Party, resolving ALC's financial relationship with the Party and staff management problems. Like Tony and Trevor, Maggie and I work very closely together — I act as a sort of sounding board for her. We telephone each other, usually late at night, two or three times a week.

"I keep in touch with our members, partly because I am also one of our political advisors in the field, and because I go to Birchcliffe once or twice a month to chat with the staff. When I'm there, I always thumb

Centre, using ALC space, not LPO. A contract was drawn up enabling the company to publish, and sell, on behalf of the Liberal Party. So also was an agreement with ALC to sell their publications on a commission basis.

£10,000 was loaned from an individual as start-up capital, and nine directors were appointed (one from the Party's policy committee, two from the National Executive and six from ALC). At the first directors' meeting, Trevor was elected Chair, John Smithson was appointed Company Secretary and Tony was appointed Managing Director. The appeal for share or loan capital was launched, trading as 'Liberal Party Publications', and the first publications appeared in time for Assembly.

The post of Organising Secretary for ALC, meanwhile, had been advertised, and Maggie Clay was appointed General Secretary (the difference in title seemed important at the time . . .). The staff expanded again to meet the workload. Andrew Stunell was appointed Councils Officer and Phil Hanmer was appointed as a part-time campaigns officer dealing with training and local elections, and to take over writing 'Grapevine' from Maggie. Jeremy Shaw left earlier in the year and David Vasmer became Political Secretary and took over editing the Bulletin.

What do you give people like Trevor and Tony as an inadequate thankyou? At the conference, Trevor was given an atlas of the world (as one-time Chairman of Dorchester Town Council's Allotments Committee, he had always been a 'And tomorrow: the world!' person). Tony was given what he really wanted (according to his wife Heather) which was a No.2 Friend. It is evidently very useful for rock climbers. John Pigott was elected the new Chair.

ALC was now large enough to have its own bureaucratic procedures. The staff had their own, minuted, meetings and wrote reports; the officers met and made recommendations or took action; the Standing Committee met to discuss the reports, major financial outlays, staff and matters of strategic importance . . . well, more important than trying to find a table.

Bulletin contained articles from those who were having to reply to the opposition, Tim Razzell of Richmond wrote about one year in control, and the biggest workshop session at the ALC conference was on local government finance. (A couple of years previously a workshop on the same subject had had to be cancelled because of lack of interest).

In April, 2,600 Liberals stood for the County Council elections and over 1,000 SDPs stood - just over 300 and 100 won, respectively. The Conservatives had lost control of half the English Counties - and of the influential Association of County Councils. The political impact nationally was considerable. The other Parties and the media sat up and took notice.

The Assembly Gazette at Dundee proved an easier operation than the previous year in Bournemouth, thanks to Chris Rennard, on loan from LPO, who took over as editor.

Not everything was successful. MicroLib (an ill-defined off-shoot for computer buffs, with its own projected mailing) never seemed quite to get off the ground. It was reported that no-one had applied to be Organiser and the MicroLib Conference had been cancelled.

On the other hand, the NLYL wanted to get involved and encourage ALC to encourage young people to become active. Rachel Pitchford, now Chair of NLYL, was invited to Birchcliffe. Her visit resulted, in 1986, in the excellent Pitchford/Vasmer Youth Campaign Pack.

Another visitor to Birchcliffe was David Alton MP who had become Chief Whip. He and Maggie discussed integrating campaigning and David Alton's desire to make the doings of the MPs more relevant to activists. Following his visit, Peter Chegwyn was asked by the Whip's Office to help produce 'Parliamentary Mailing', along the lines of 'Campaign Mailing'. The Liberal Parliamentary Association would help fund it, and ALC would promote it by subscription. It was the first joint venture of its kind, and the first mailing from the Whip's Office out to Party members.

Earlier in the year, a staff meeting minute showed that the Association of Social Democratic Councillors would like to discuss the possibility of approaching the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust to fund a joint SDP/Lib office in London. The London bit wasn't even deemed worthy of putting to Standing Committee, but the rest of the idea resulted, nine months later, in Bill Le Breton of the Isle of Wight becoming County Councils Officer - the first joint Liberal/SDP appointment.

This helped to relieve Andrew Stunell of some of his Council advising work. He had become the expert on negotiating. Liberals who had never negotiated anything more difficult than the ward quota with the constituency treasurer, were now members of groups having to negotiate Council budgets of £ millions with Conservative and Labour

through all the piles of letters, leaflets and ideas which members send in.

"Maggie and I have probably changed the style of ALC a bit. It is not less radical, but it is a bit less brash, more business-like. There are important priorities now... we have to try to help Council groups to do their job properly and that forces you to organise and plan in a well-defined way. After all, there has been such a dramatic increase in the number of Council groups that our advice may affect the running of whole areas rather than just the destiny of the few individual people trying to break into the Council for the first time.

"I still see ALC as offering new ideas and acting as the radical conscience of the Party, if you like. We have to, or we'd just become another recognised body within the Party. At the moment we are seen as something different... and if we weren't we'd simply sink back to being a group representing Councillors, rather than as a campaigning group.

"But we have to recognise that ALC is such a big organisation now that we have to compromise a bit. We can't get our own way all the time. You can't go to the barricades over every issue. It all has to pull together. The whole thing has to work."



The new line-up of top ALC people for 1985. Roger Hayes (Vice-Chair), Chris Willmore (Secretary), Trevor Jones (out-going Chair), Maggie Clay (General Secretary), John Pigott (out-going Treasurer, in-coming Chair), David Vasmer (Political Secretary). Backs of heads to be guessed at.

Three cheers for the ALC!

AMID all the claims, counter-claims, celebrations and general ballyhoo following the Liberal/Alliance triumph in the shires, may I cry 'halt' for one brief moment so that all of us can duly say a heartfelt thanks to the people who brought about this huge change in the political map of Britain?, writes CHARLES STAINSBY.

The candidates? Yes. They certainly deserve all praise for the amount of sheer graft they put into the election. A splendid effort - particularly when one remembers that there is no 'natural' inbuilt majority for the Alliance candidates. They have to fight for their votes and many of them have had to demonstrate over a good many years that they believe in community politics and in the virtues of what far too many Westminster politicians sneeringly dismiss as 'the cracked pavement' approach.

But, having said all that, all fair-minded Liberals (and, indeed, all members of the SDP from David Owen downwards) should stand up and cheer the ALC - yes, the ALC, the Association of Liberal Councillors which has done more to justify its existence (and its frequent pugnacity!) than any other single element in the Party.

It is the ALC that has beavered away about 'cracked pavements' and the vote-winning vital things associated with that term. It is the ALC that has campaigned for campaigns and has been mainly responsible for mounting them. It is the ALC that pounced upon the Health Service cuts and turned the attack on the NHS into one of the most potent criticisms of Thatcherism.

It is to the ALC that the SDP has

looked for its tutors in grass-roots activism.

Yet this same ALC has been criticised so frequently from on high and from 'central' sources that many of those who now rush in to praise this huge success of last Thursday ought at least to have had the grace to blush!

LIBERAL NEWS has often been criticised for the amount of coverage it gives and has given to ALC affairs. Well, we do try to be 'balanced'. But it remains a fact - or at least this is the firm impression I have gained from my particular vantage point - that the ALC is the Liberal Party's greatest political asset.

It is brilliantly organised. It is indefatigable in its endeavours. Its key personnel present the Liberal case with lucidity and good humour! They are actually a pleasure to work with however caustically 'invigorating' they can be at times...

Frequently strapped for cash (but aren't we all?), often the target for petty jealousies, the ALC richly deserves the triumph it has achieved.

Some of its publications are models of informative know-how. Indeed, the Party can heave a huge sigh of relief that its publications have now been placed in ALC hands.

For that organisation's sense of purpose, vigour and sheer determination should bring about a huge improvement.

So there it is. Three well-deserved cheers for the ALC and - so far as LIBERAL NEWS is concerned - three extra cheers for those ALC people with whom we have most to do in an editorial sense - Margaret Clay, Tony Greaves and David Vasmer. Our order of precedence is purely alphabetical! They all do a splendid job for us, as this current issue once again demonstrates.

Council leaders.

And, asked Paddy Ashdown of ALC, what about Parliamentary negotiating skills?

The Parliamentary Liberal Party is invited to the Birchcliffe Centre en masse. David Alton is keen and David steel readily agrees. The PLP will meet the Parliamentary Liberal Association on the Sunday. ALC provides dinner on Friday night. Various group Council leaders, with proven skills in negotiating in balance of power situations, are invited the following day to share their experience.

The session wasn't quite as planned. 'I didn't come here to be lectured at by ALC' said Cyril Smith firmly, to murmured assent from the MPs. But the general discussion that followed was good, and helpful. The media wondered what on earth was going on.

ALC still needs more staff. Victoria Spencer and John Ross joined to help with administration... and printing. Because the year ALC launched a whole publishing company, it buys its first off-set printing machine!

The amount of sheer hard work achieved by the staff in 1986 was astonishing. ALC has become a major political organisation.

The staff reports to the Standing Committee are pages long. The staff minutes of their meeting in May 1986 cover 64 items, all for action. They range from 'Polling day organisation not as good as it should be - Bulletin piece and fringe meeting at Assembly' to 'Full staff appraisal this summer' to 'Talk to the Scottish Liberal Party' to 'VAT refunds need chasing up'. Twelve policy conferences are being organised and six campaigns are planned, or reported on.

The LPO grant for 1986 was raised to £27,000, and no wonder. Of those particular staff minutes, only twelve items were strictly for the membership of ALC. All the rest were, in a sense, services to the Party as a whole. Only 12 years ago, LPO asked ALC for a 'service' charge of £100.

To help provide the answers to enquiries, David Vasmer has now built up a huge library of reports, magazines, mailings and books. Everything from 'Planning Appeals', 'Youth Training News', 'Health Help' and, in case anyone should think ALC is parochial in its outlook, 'Strategic World Survey 85/6'. Vas's total workload as Political Secretary is astonishing.

Training now includes How to Cope with Stress, as well as How to Get Started!

1986

The media wondering what on earth all the MPs are doing in Hebden Bridge 200 miles away from Westminster.



Action with the ALC

John Holmes had retired from LPO as Chief Agent. Would ALC take the job on? David tries, but it quickly became apparent that it was not a job to be squeezed into an already busy day. Would LPO pay £10,000 for extra staff? No.

Andy Ellis was appointed General Secretary of LPO - a far cry from being ALC's first member of staff, part-time, for £250. Tim Clement-Jones was elected Chair of the Party.

Many of the early difficulties between Hebden Royd Publications and ALC had been ironed out. The two organisations, both under the same umbrella, and working side by side in a confined space, had had to establish a new working relationship. One was established, membership-based, grant-aided and with elected officers; the other was new, commercially based, with shareholders and appointed directors. The problems were practical: should the staff be paid the same? If HRP had cashflow problems, should ALC, like an equally broke friend, have first call on outstanding sales commission, or should it, like a parent, show understanding and wait for payment?

Certainly the incredibly hard-working David Clamp has built up a sales operation which had benefited ALC's own sales. More mail order customers are reached, and more stalls for direct selling are organised, than ALC alone could manage.

The Bulletin still admonished its members. 'Learning the Lessons of Not Targetting' was the June editorial, and the members still use the Bulletin as their communication link with each other. Members wrote, in one issue, from Essex, Lambeth, Devon, Peterborough, Adur, Strathkelvin, Middlesbrough, Walsall and Cumbria. Exhortation continued. 'Focus alone is not enough' wrote Peter Chegwyn.

The proliferating number of workshops at Conference, and fringe meetings at Assembly, show the difficulty of catering for a membership that varies from group leaders controlling Councils to those who are still wondering how to start Focus in a derelict ward. There are those who want to discuss the rate support grant, and those who want to discuss the relative merits of Cow-Gum and Pritt Stick in laying out a leaflet - let alone how to find deliverers.

Andrew Stunell travelled to Council groups in Milton Keynes, Shropshire, Somerset, St. Albans, Rochdale, the Isle of Wight, Woking, Trafford and London during the summer. It is fifteen years since Gordon Lishman travelled around the country, in

Interview . . . Interview . . .

Andrew Ellis
Travelling Organiser for ALC for three months in 1977.
Now General Secretary of LPO.

"I can remember going to Northampton and Norwich in the spring of '77. I'd have to look up my collection of train tickets - of course I keep them all - so does John Smithson - to tell exactly where I went.

"The important thing that ALC has done for the Party is to give it a sense that it can win. The important thing it has done for Liberalism is to persuade people that Liberalism isn't about debate or ideas, but about doing something in practice.

"ALC's future role? The area agents are doing a lot of the things that ALC had to do in the beginning - like training and getting people started. ALC now has to concentrate on serving Councillors in control or in balance. And their other real growing role is in integrating local and national campaigning."



The staff of Hebden Royd Publications Ltd. (Liberal Party Publications) bringing tons, literally, of stock to sell at The Barbican rally, London. L-r Tony Greaves, David Clamp, Pamela Hallowell and Karen Birch.

Ten years at the Birchcliffe

1986-1987

his yellow van, looking for Liberals who might put out a Focus.

Relations with the PLP were good - Simon Hughes as Environment spokesman worked with ALC as no-one had before. 'Parliamentary Mailing' was a great success.

Chris Willmore, as an ALC person, spent a lot of time at meetings in London as one of the 'magnificent seven' who worked on 'Priorities for the 1990s' which became 'Partnership for Progress' which became 'The Time Has Come'. She helped with the final manifesto.

At the Assembly at Eastbourne, the ALC motion, 'After the General Election' was passed early in the week. Next came the debate on defence which proved to be such an opinion-poll disaster subsequently. Later on in the week, Partnership for Progress, the joint Alliance draft programme, was to be debated. The ALC put forward an amendment seeking further discussion and revision. It was clear the Party's establishment felt threatened, and a negotiated amended amendment was agreed - provided ALC could 'deliver the vote'. The full, but amended, motion was passed - but not because ALC can ever 'deliver a vote'; Liberals still vote the way they want to vote individually.

Hebden Royd had a walk-in shop at Assembly; ALC organised twenty-seven fringe meetings; Chris Willmore chaired a Commission on Central and Local Government; and ALC held its first 'President's Reception', advertised with ALC's customary lack of pomposity as Phoebe's Freebie. The Assembly Gazette was printed on site, by the Gestetner exhibition stand.

Later in the year, ALC decided on a new fund-raising venture and, with LPO and National Executive agreement, appointed Adrian Sanders as Advertising Manager of Liberal News (ALC gets a commission) and also as a much needed assistant for David Vasmer on the information desk.

Adrian was also asked to help Andrew Stunell organise ALC's Conference in January 1987. No-one asked him to organise, write and produce ALC's first Revue to be performed at the Conference. It was a success, and Adrian may have started another ALC tradition. The staff turned out, luckily, to have a talent for unrehearsed ad-libbing.

David Steel came to the ALC Conference for the second year running. This time, he spent Friday evening meeting members at a social gathering.



Adrian Sanders in The Birchcliffe Centre carpark.

1987

Maggie Clay speaking publicly to a lot of people.



Action with the ALC

Phil Hanmer left, and three temporary staff were taken on in the spring to cope with the local elections and the forthcoming General Election. ALC predicted 400 gains in May - and, once again, were proved to be accurate in their forecasts based on the feedback which Phil Hanmer had collected.

As soon as the local election results were known, Mrs Thatcher announced a General Election.

Maggie Clay, David Vasmer and Andrew Stunell were Parliamentary candidates and it was agreed that Bill le Breton should move up to Birchcliffe Centre for the duration of the campaign. His main job, with Adrian Sanders and the Birchcliffe team, was to produce 'General Election Campaign Mailing' for all Liberal and SDP candidates.

But, how very different it all is from 1983. This time, Campaign Mailing is produced by agreement with both Alliance Parties - an agreement reached before the election was announced. ALC's Chairman, John Pigott, has been based in Cowley Street Campaign HQ and, with Tim Clement-Jones and John Roper (SDP), has been responsible for producing 'Campaign Briefing' for all candidates. The two teams based in London and Hebden Bridge have been bouncing ideas to and fro over the Fax machine. The result has been concerted, well-structured, well-informed and well-received mailings to all candidates in the field.

And there, in the middle of the General Election, our story ends.

There is, of course, an up-date on the Liberal jewellery saga. Some is reported to have become booty prizes for Pendle tombola stalls - but the winners always give it back. Some was handed to Chris Willmore in a box, along with the (North-avon, now) Constituency minute book dating back to 1926. And some can be seen on display in the window of 'The Wool Shop' in Earby, Lancs - Prop. Liberal Councillor Doris Allen.

Where do we go from here? No potted history like this ends without a paragraph called, The Future, with a question mark.



Ten years at the Birchcliffe

So - The Future?

So — The Future?

Ignoring the future in terms of the country, the Alliance, the Liberal Party, (or the result of the General Election 1987), ALC's future problem is this: how does it balance continuing to be a membership based organisation, existing to serve its members and represent their interests within the national Party, while continuing to serve the whole Party on such a scale?

ALC by virtue of its success as a competent, almost entrepreneurial organisation, ('If it sells, we'll sell it', said Tony Greaves of some bath towels hanging around the ALC stall in the late seventies) coupled with a political flair for giving people the advice they need at any given time, means that, quite simply, it is tempting for the Party to ask ALC to do more and more. It is also tempting for ALC to do more and more because they want to influence what happens.

Who would have imagined that the local government people, once tucked away in the kitchen (literally) would have spilled out into the drawing room, where the grown-ups used to discuss weighty national issues? Who would have thought that ALC would have the majority vote on a company which acts as the Party's publishing house? Who would have thought that ALC would employ the advertising manager of *Liberal News*? Who would have thought ALC would have been asked (and refused) to take on the job of Chief Agent? Who would have thought that ALC, through Chris Willmore, would have a say in the manifesto? Or, with John Pigott, be represented on the National Campaign Committee? It is all a far cry from ALC begging LPO for a list of Council candidates.

But if ALC gets more and more tied up with the organisational, and even business, matters of the Party - and it is paid a grant by the Party to do so - then where is ALC's independence - so hard fought for, and guarded, in the early years? And, if it is no longer independent, can it reflect the radical cutting edge its members expect? What will ALC represent?

It is made both easier, and more difficult, for ALC to achieve this balancing act in that, in a sense, ALC is 'establishment' now - or, perhaps, the 'establishment' is ALC. There was a nice moment at a meeting of the board of directors of Hebden Royd. One of the directors said, in a traditional, slightly truculent, ALC manner, 'What the Party has to realise is . . . they must . . .' Someone said, 'But we are the Party.' The

The main ALC office, July, 1987.



It now even extends around the corner . . . and note the new technology!

you stock up.
We hope you will make the most of
you every success.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Clay

Margaret Clay
GENERAL SECRETARY

P.S. Last year over 80% of the
candidates who won were ALC
members; 80% of those who
lost were not. It pays to
join ALC!

Maggie's P.S. to a letter to all
Council candidates, written in
January 1987, says it all.

Action with the ALC

infamous 'they' were all sitting round the same table, laughing.

It will be easy for ALC to forget its own grass roots. I don't imagine it ever will. There are still a lot of people wondering how on earth to get started, wondering how to campaign locally, wondering how to 'help organise people in communities to take and use power'.

ALC STAFF AND STANDING COMMITTEE

Most of the credit for the success of ALC - best measured by the spread of Liberalism in Councils up and down the country - has to go to the staff. Many employees of the Party are dedicated and hardworking and are poorly paid for what they do. ALC staff are particularly poorly paid - we keep having to employ more people to meet the political demands. But, from the days of Tony working alone, to the present day, the staff have shown a level of competence and political acumen which has to be unusual.

Certainly, the ALC staff have put paid to the media idea that Liberals are woolly-minded, inefficient and impractical.

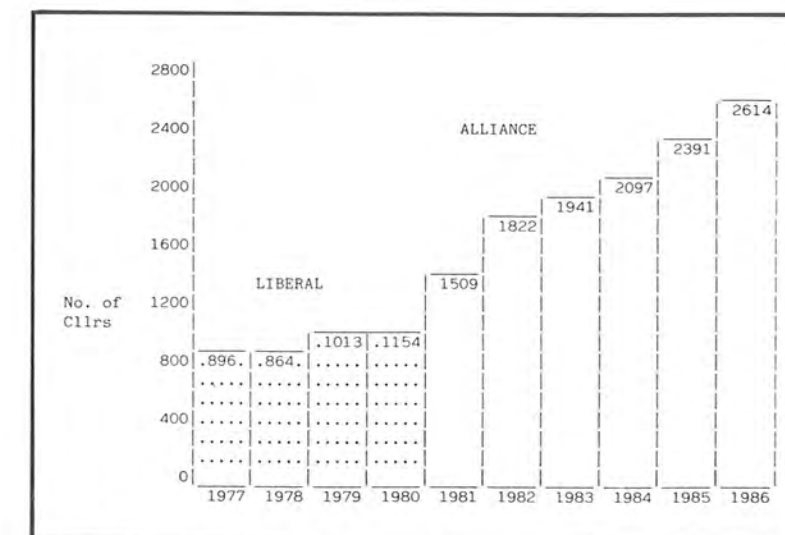
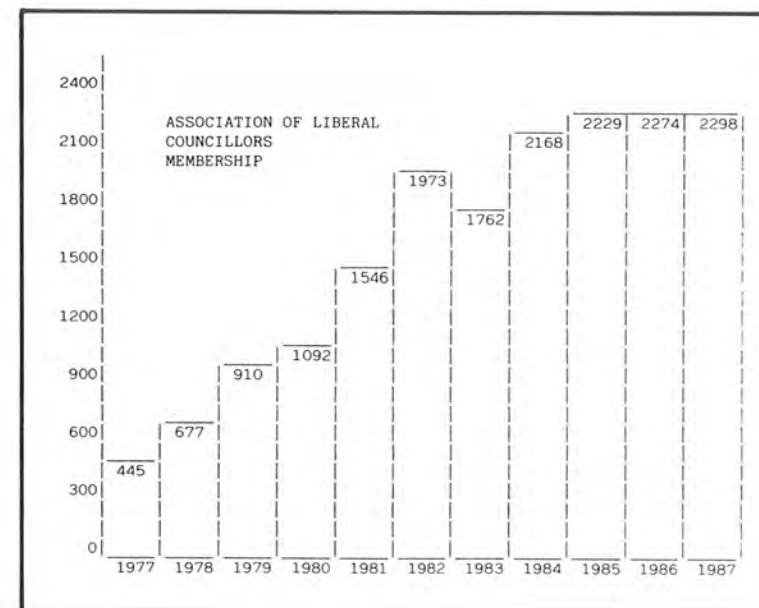
Perhaps the most interesting thing about the staff is that, despite very individual and marked personalities, they have always worked totally as a team. They have not been appointed because they would make good bureaucrats, or office managers, but because they are committed, and often elected, political activists outside the office. They have no need to 'play' office politics. Their mutual respect is based on the fact that they practise what they preach.

This is also true of the elected, and therefore changing, Officers and Standing Committee. Most of them have no need to prove themselves around the committee table - and everyone knows that if you want something done, ask a busy person. The Standing Committee are all busy people.

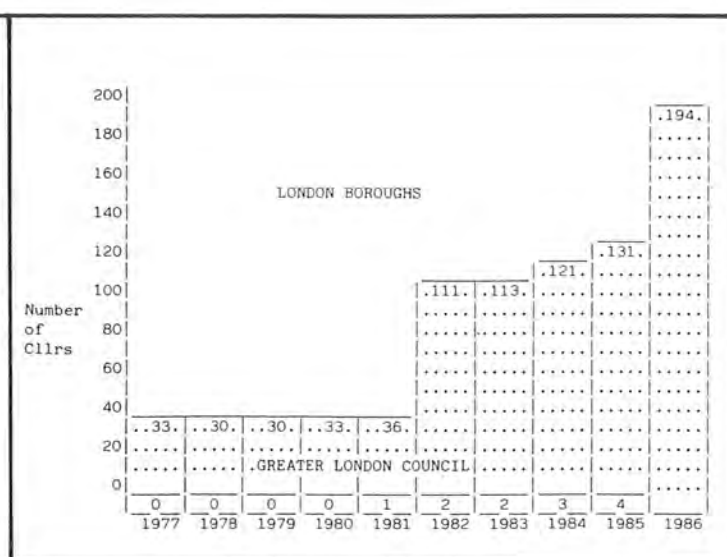
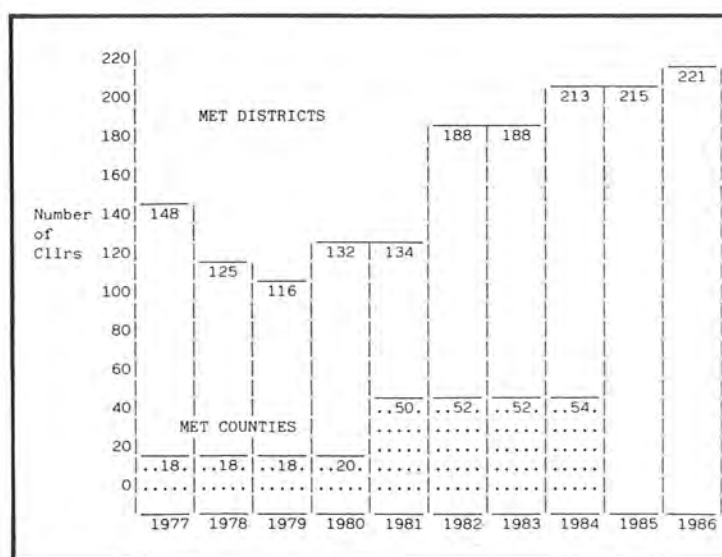
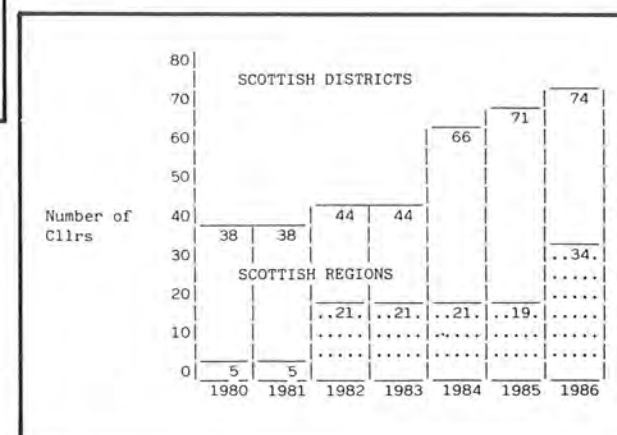
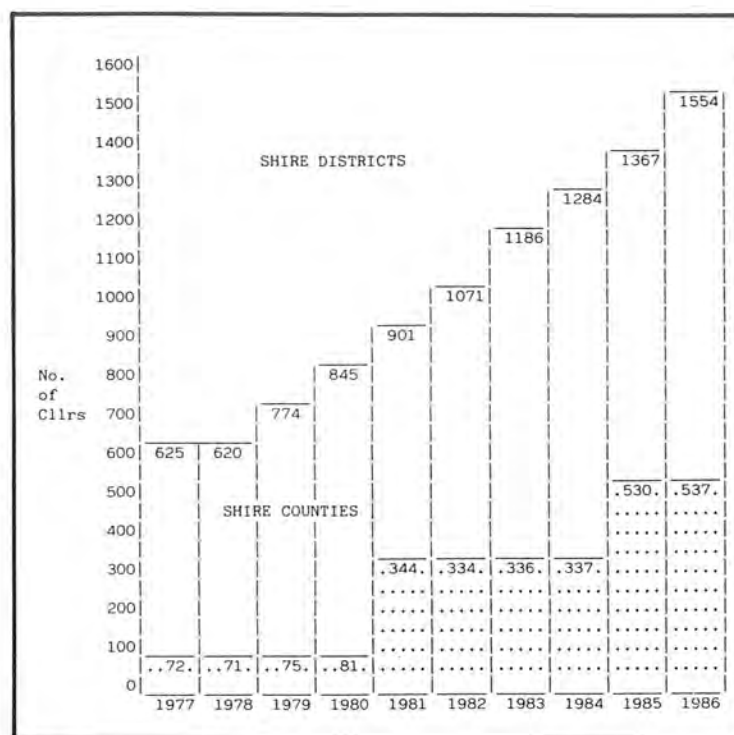
Ten years at the Birchcliffe

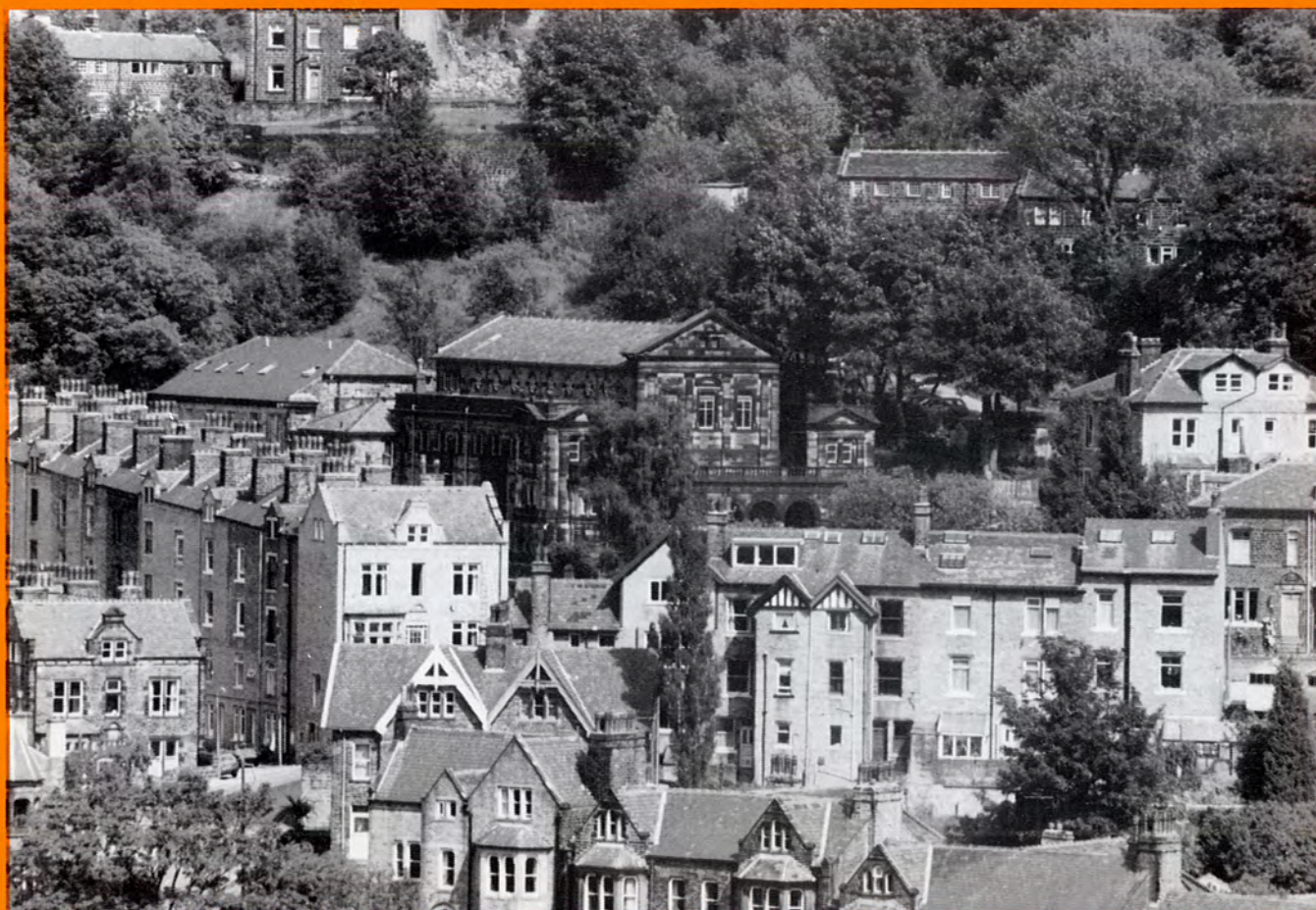
So - The Future?

It wasn't until I began writing this book that I appreciated the remarkable progression of political planning behind each ALC move ahead. Spotting the next political need, planning to meet it, then taking the necessary steps to put the plan into action. This shows a degree of professionalism in politics which is rare in any political party.



Action with the ALC





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