‘We in Scotland have to make our stand for pure Liberalism’: John M. Bannerman and Scottish politics, 1932–1968

EWEN A. CAMERON

Abstract
This article assesses the political career of John M. Bannerman from his entry into Scottish politics in the early 1930s until his final speeches in the House of the Lords in the late 1960s. The principal issue which it addresses is the history of the Liberal party in Scotland in the period from 1945 to the late 1960s. By analysing Bannerman's Liberal candidatures (he stood eight times in four different Scottish constituencies from 1945 to 1964, losing on each occasion), his attitude to Scottish Home Rule, his role in keeping the Scottish Liberal Party alive, and his ideas on the revival of the Scottish Highlands, it deals with his role in the survival of a party which had once dominated Scottish politics but had fallen into deep decline. The position of the Liberal Party during a period in which the Labour Party and the Scottish Unionist Party dominated the politics of Scotland is also a theme of the article. Some additional comments are made about the way in which both the Scottish Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party have deployed Bannerman’s memory in arguing their positions vis-à-vis post-devolution Scottish politics.

In December 1967 the well-known Liberal politician, John M. Bannerman, made a powerful speech about the condition of the Scottish Highlands:

> The Highlands constitute 9 million acres – half the area of Scotland; yet only 4 percent of the people of Scotland stay there and live there. The Kildonan clearances have had their counterpart throughout Scotland for two centuries, and they still continue, not so blatantly to-day, but numerically far worse. If the Scottish Highlander is not to die off in a nature reserve the Highlands Board[1] must renew the whole economic fabric of the Highlands. This it can do by making the owner of land … in the Highlands a trustee of the nation for the production of folk and food. I do not suggest nationalisation or expropriation, but I feel that if the owner of land cannot do what he ought to do for the land he owns, then a fair rental should be paid to him to allow others to do the job. There are in the Highlands one million acres, undeveloped and bracken-covered, which, after survey and reclamation, could be allocated to the production of folk and food and timber. … the question of land is basic to the survival of our area of the Highlands, and of Scotland, and it must enter into any debate which concerns itself with the condition of Scotland. So I feel that the improvident neglect of our limited land resources in Scotland is a constant rebuke to Government.[2]

That a prominent Liberal with a long history of political activity in the Scottish Highlands should make such remarks might seem a straightforward event. The context in which the speech was made, however, casts a different light on its contents. Bannerman had just been ennobled, as Lord Bannerman of Kildonan, and this speech was made in the House of Lords, a forum unused to

[1] The Highlands and Islands Development Board, founded by the Labour government in 1965 with the aim of diversifying the economy of the Scottish Highlands.
[2] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser. vol. 287, cols 706–7, 6 December 1967.

hearing pleas for Scottish land reform.[3] This paper will seek to explain how his career came to this point, and examine what this tells us about Scottish politics in the post-war period. There will be a particular focus on the decline, but ultimate survival, of the Liberal party as part of Scotland's political scene.

At first sight the political career of John M. Bannerman is impressive. attractive, but only in an anecdotal sense. Prior to his elevation to the House of Lords in 1967 he had been a Liberal candidate in Scotland in eight contests between 1945 and 1964, losing on each occasion. He was one of those who kept alive the Liberal party, once dominant in Scotland, in its least successful period. He had been involved in the gathering of disparate sects which led in 1934 to the formation of the Scottish National Party. (His particular involvement was with the Scottish Party, a short-lived and quite right-wing organisation, which subsequently merged with the National Party of Scotland in 1934 to produce the SNP.) Prior to his death in the late 1960s, Bannerman served as President of the Scottish Liberal Party, and the organisational improvements that he had overseen were largely credited for the party's better electoral performances in that decade.

In addition to his political skills, Bannerman possessed an attractive character. The *Times* described him as 'a big man with the Gaelic, a great record on the rugby field, and enough charm and eloquence even to make members of the Free Church stop on their way to devotions'.[4] As a sportsman, he had been one of the heroes of the Scottish rugby team which enjoyed considerable success in the 1920s including, in 1925, Scotland's first Grand Slam win. A highly competitive second-row forward, he was capped on thirty-seven consecutive occasions between 1921 and 1929 – a record which stood until 1962 – and in the 1950s served as President of the Scottish Rugby Union. As John Fowler has written:

> For almost the entire 'twenties Bannerman was every Scots boy's hero on the rugby field, a stocky, bristling second-row forward who played hard for every second of the eighty minutes, a masterly controller of the ball who led those great forward rushes which typified Scottish rugby between the wars.[5]

Bannerman was dedicated to the amateur ethos of rugby; indeed, something of this carried over to his view of politics:

> I have always been of the opinion that rugby was a game to be played and not talked about … rugby is a game of worth, to be enjoyed by the player for its skills and its sciences and for the lessons it teaches.[6]

He was a proponent of vigorous forward play and the merits of the 3-2-3 formation in the scrum (as opposed to 3-4-1) which he saw as quintessentially Scottish and central to the Scottish team's success in recording ten victories in twelve matches between 1925 and 1927. In his memoirs he drew a political lesson from this experience:

> I hope that Scotland will never forget the lesson we learned in rugby and will seek to apply it in all Scottish matters. Take what is good from other countries, test it, use it, but never allow the natural, traditional Scottish methods and outlook to be submerged … Scotland has a unique position in this respect and affection of the peoples of the world with whom she has any contact. She retains this regard in spite of the standardising influence and dictation of

[3] Bannerman's elevation to the Lords was not uncontroversial: the Young Liberals criticised him, as well as party leader Jeremy Thorpe, over the matter of life peerages; *Times*, 17 November 1967, 1.
[4] *Times*, 24 March 1966, 8.
[5] John Fowler (ed.), *Bannerman: The Memoirs of Lord Bannerman of Kildonan* (Aberdeen: Impulse Publications, 1972), 48. The editor, a journalist on the *Scottish Daily Express*, described in his 'Preface' (at page 9) the way he 'revised and edited the manuscript [left unfinished by Bannerman on his death in 1968] in detail and … tried to fill in briefly the most obvious gaps in his incomplete narrative'.
[6] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 58–9.

> centralised government in London. It says much for the tenacity and distinctive qualities of the Scot and for the worth of his institutions that we still survive the greatest takeover bid in history – the submergence and the absorption of the Scottish parliament by its English counterpart in 1707.[7]

As the *Times* noted, Bannerman was also a leading figure in the world of Scottish Gaelic, where he was a well-regarded singer, and in 1922 was a gold medallist at the Mòd – the annual festival of Gaelic culture – having won the recitation medal in 1921. He was a frequent broadcaster in Gaelic and a stalwart servant of a variety of organisations which sought to promote the language in post-war Scotland.[8]

Bannerman's family background was among the Gaels of Glasgow, his father having migrated from the Hebridean island of South Uist as a small child in 1873. In his memoirs he recalled that 'everything conspired to make my life one of two worlds', Gaelic and English.[9] Although many of his political contests were in Highland constituencies, where he used his Gaelic identity to good effect, he was also able to draw on his background in the urban industrial areas of the Western Lowlands in his contests in Paisley in 1961 and 1964.

Bannerman was also a noted farmer, with sheep and cattle at Balmaha in Stirlingshire. Having come to know the Montroses while working in Arran for the Department of Agriculture, Bannerman became a tenant of the 6th Duke of Montrose from 1930, and for a period acted as the Duke's estate manager, or 'factor'. The Duke was involved in nationalist politics and the Duchess was a Gaelic enthusiast. Towards the end of his career, Bannerman's relationship with the Marquess of Graham, later the 7th Duke of Montrose, a university contemporary at Oxford, brought him into controversial areas related to the Duke's position as Agriculture Minister in the Rhodesian Cabinet and a signatory, in 1965, of the Unilateral Declaration on Independence.[10] Angus Graham, as he was known in Rhodesia, was by the 1960s marginalised in Rhodesian politics 'due to his relatively hard-line stance on racial separation (even by Rhodesian standards)'.[11]

So we need to ask: how do we characterise John Bannerman? Some paradoxes and complexities must be noted. Was he a Liberal or a Scottish nationalist, both of those political labels having several distinct varieties? How should we describe an advocate of land-reform and an anti-landlord orator who had acted as a factor for a leading Scottish landlord? What do we make of a Scottish Home Ruler who was apparently uncritical of a white supremacist government in Africa? Were these personal relationships more important to him than the political complications that they brought? Was Bannerman a serious political figure in Scottish Liberalism, or simply adept at deploying his celebrity to cultivate a personal vote?

Bannerman's sporting prowess was an important factor in his initial rise to political prominence. In 1937, on the occasion of the Glasgow Hillhead by-election, he was considered as a Liberal candidate with much weight given to the fact that he was very well-known from his days as a rugby international, although some leading Liberals doubted whether this was enough to secure him the candidacy in an important by-election. Archibald Sinclair, leader of the Independent Liberals, worried that 'people might listen to him because he plays football well but they would

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[7] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 61–2.

[8] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 81–8.

[9] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 24, see also 15. This is an interesting echo, unconscious perhaps, of the memoir of the son of an Edinburgh Rabbi who would later go on to be a distinguished literary scholar; his book describes the way in which his home life and his school and later university life were conducted in separate realms, see David Daiches, *Two Worlds* (London: Macmillan, 1957).

[10] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 69–75. The friendship was sufficiently close for Bannerman to have been a guest at the Marquess of Graham's wedding at St Giles Cathedral in 1930; *Scotsman*, 21 October 1930, 6.

[11] David Kenrick, *Decolonisation, Identity and Nation in Rhodesia, 1964–1979* (Cham: Springer International, 2019), 108; *Guardian*, 23 December 1962, 5; *Times*, 13 February 1992, 15.

only vote for him if he is in other respects a good and effective candidate'.[12] In the event, there was no Liberal candidate, footballer or not; the seat went to the Unionists and remained with them until Roy Jenkins' famous by-election victory in 1982.

Press coverage of Bannerman's political career was mixed. In 1950, the *Inverness Courier* damned him with faint praise by referring to him as 'the famous footballer who, as an Independent Liberal candidate in Argyll at the last general election, received 3000 votes out of a total poll of 27,000'.[13] Referring to his campaign in Paisley in 1961, the political correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald* touched on this issue in a slightly more positive way: 'Mr Bannerman, the Liberal candidate is – well he is Johnny Bannerman. A rugby player about whose deeds elderly men reminisce with shining eyes…'.[14] At the Scottish Universities by-election in 1946 *The Scotsman* was also rather sceptical: 'His estimable personal qualities and his record as a Rugby player do not quite meet the requirements for a University member'.[15] On other occasions he referred to the matter himself. At Inverness in 1950 he acknowledged that

> he was sometimes referred to as a rugby footballer and a Gaelic singer. He agreed that no man should be returned to Parliament simply because he ran after a football a little bit faster than someone else or because he sang a Gaelic song a little bit louder than somebody else – (laughter) – and it has taken him a long time to convince people that such brains as he did possess were not all centred on his feet – (laughter and applause).[16]

Bannerman's popular appeal was sometimes used by his political opponents to play down the significance of his relative successes. At the Inverness by-election in 1954, the Unionists affected to be unconcerned by his strong showing, and interpreted the result as neither an indication of a Liberal resurgence, nor increased support for Home Rule, but, rather, 'a personal vote, not a political one'.[17]

Although there have been short biographical studies of Bannerman, his political career has not been considered in the round nor studied with a view to addressing wider questions relating to developments in Scottish politics in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s.[18] Some of these questions include the history of Scottish Liberalism in its years of extreme weakness in the decades following the Second World War; the means by which it sought to stay alive, and the battles between different factions for the soul of the party; the way in which Scottish Home Rule was discussed in an era characterised by most historians as one of unionist consensus; the cross-party attempts made to link SNP and Liberal activities in pursuit of Scottish self-government; and, finally, how ideas about the Highland land question developed in the post-war period.

This article will seek to examine these issues through the lens of Bannerman's political career by considering the evidence of his eight by-election and general election campaigns from 1945 to 1964, as well as the speeches he gave in the House of Lords during his short period there prior to

[12] Churchill College, Cambridge, Thurso Mss, THRS II, Box 68 Folder 2, Ranald Finlay to C.J.L. Brock, 13 May 1937; Findlay to Archibald Sinclair, 13 May 1937; Sinclair to Findlay, 14 May 1937.
[13] *Inverness Courier*, 6 January 1950, 2
[14] *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1961, 6.
[15] *The Scotsman*, 15 November 1946, 4.
[16] *Inverness Courier*, 7 February 1950, 3.
[17] Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, CCO 1/10/567/2, Patrick Blair to Sir Stephen Pierssené, Gen. Dir. Unionist Central Office, London, 29 December 1954.
[18] Richard J. Finlay, 'Bannerman, John Macdonald, Baron Bannerman of Kildonan (1901–1969)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (online edition, Jan 2012 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40285]; Alan Massie, *101 Great Scots* (Edinburgh: William Collins, 1987), 289–91; Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Glasgow, 1994), 27; see also David Torrance, *A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 85–111.

his untimely death in 1968. Bannerman's election campaigns, especially those in Inverness-shire in the 1950s and in Paisley in 1961 and 1964, shed light on how candidates like Bannerman sought to align themselves with the political identities and self-conscious political traditions of different constituencies at this period – such as 'political independence' in Inverness-shire and 'radicalism' in Paisley.

Bannerman's speeches in the Lords portray a slightly different politician from the figure that emerges from his election campaigns. Whereas in his campaigns he relied on his personal appeal rather than on detailed exposition of policy, his addresses to the Lords contain more substance, especially on issues such as the development of the Highlands and Scottish Home Rule. There he was able to use his expertise as a farmer and member of the Forestry Commission to make authoritative, although highly political, statements on such matters.

Bannerman is well remembered in the Scottish political tradition, and has been claimed both by the Liberal Party and their successors as well as by the SNP. In her celebrated speech to the opening session of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Winifred Ewing sought to establish a pantheon of those who had kept the flame of devolution burning in the long years leading up to 1999, and she included Bannerman in her list of heroes.[19] On other occasions, she and other SNP MSPs referred to Bannerman as they taunted the Scottish Liberal Democrats for their lack of radicalism and their coalition with the Scottish Labour Party, both of which, they argued, would have caused Bannerman and Jo Grimond to 'turn in their graves'.[20] The Scottish Liberal Democrats also, of course, claim Bannerman, not least through the entry in the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* written by his daughter, Ray Michie, who was MP for Argyll from 1987 to 2001, a seat contested by her father in 1945.[21] Indeed, in her maiden speech in the House of Commons she remarked:

> I was born and brought up in the Liberal faith and philosophy and I owe my success in large part to the continuing example and inspiration of my father – the late Lord Bannerman of Kildonan. Better known in Scotland, in politics, in international rugby and in Gaeldom as Johnnie Bannerman, he cut his political teeth in Argyll at the 1945 general election.[22]

To what extent, then, does Bannerman's political career help us to explain these contested political memories?

Bannerman and Scottish Home Rule

Although all of Bannerman's post-war election campaigns were in the name of the Scottish Liberal Party, he first entered the political limelight in the inter-war period among the diverse groups in Scottish nationalist politics. He subscribed to the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1929 when he first became seriously interested in politics.[23] In his memoirs, Bannerman recalled that it was 'the spectacle of shameful unemployment' and the massive emigration of the 1920s which took him into politics.[24] His first public activity was in support of John MacCormick's nationalist candidature in Inverness-shire in 1935.[25] MacCormick, for whom Bannerman had a very high regard, would later be a close colleague in the task of modernising Scottish Liberalism in the 1940s and 1950s.

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[19] *Official Report of the Scottish Parliament*, 12 May 1999; Winnie Ewing, *Stop the World: The Autobiography of Winnie Ewing*, ed. Michael Russell (Edinburgh, 2004), 90, 291.

[20] *Official Report of the Scottish Parliament*, 19 May 1999 (Alex Neil); 28 Feb 2002 (Winnie Ewing); 7 May 2002 (Alex Neil).

[21] Duncan Brack (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (London: Politico, 1998), 27–9.

[22] *House of Commons Debates*, 6th ser., vol. 119, col. 716, 13 July 1987.

[23] Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland [NLS], Scottish Secretariat, Acc. 3721/1/12, Roland Muirhead to Bannerman, 9 May 1929.

[24] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 97.

[25] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 97–9; J. M. MacCormick, *The Flag in the Wind: The Story of the National Movement in Scotland* (London: Gollancz, 1955), 88–9.

In the 1930s, however, Bannerman was more active in the Scottish Party, founded in 1932 as a right-wing antidote to what it perceived as leftist and impractical tendencies in the NPS. Bannerman's link with the Scottish Party may well have come about through his connections to the sixth Duke of Montrose, a leading Scottish Party figure. The Scottish Party originated when a Glasgow Solicitor, J. Kevan MacDowall, and others resigned from the Unionist Association of Cathcart (on the south side of Glasgow) in 1932, and coalesced with other right-wing nationalists including Andrew Dewar Gibb, Regius Professor of Law at the University of Glasgow, and George Malcolm Thomson, a journalist and close advisor of Lord Beaverbrook, in advocating a nationalism which would restore Scotland to its rightful place at the heart of the British Empire.[26] This imperialist nationalism would counteract leftist and cultural-nationalist tendencies in the National Party of Scotland.[27]

Bannerman became involved in a controversy over a by-election at Kilmarnock in 1933, when it seemed likely at one point that there would be a disastrous contest between NPS and Scottish Party candidates. Bannerman was proposed as a possible joint candidate, but it has been argued that his associations with the Scottish Party damned him in the eyes of leading members of the NPS. In the event, the Provost of Inverness, Sir Alexander MacEwen, emerged as a joint candidate.[28] The purging of the NPS of its 'extremist' elements in 1933 led to the creation of the SNP in 1934, and future crises, such as that which threatened at Kilmarnock, were avoided.

In this period there was much crossover between the Liberal Party and the Scottish nationalists. MacEwen had close links to the Liberals, as did Bannerman, and the Liberals had a long tradition of support for Scottish Home Rule. At the same time, although there was crossover in personnel, the relationship between the Liberals and the SNP was uneasy. Leading Liberals felt that the SNP did not give them enough credit for their advocacy of Scottish Home Rule. By September 1937, after giving reassurances that he was not a 'Simonite' (after Sir John Simon, who led the Liberals who entered the National Government in 1931) and was willing to support 'Samuelite' (after Herbert Samuel, who led the Liberals who left the National Government in 1932) positions on free trade, Bannerman was adopted as the Liberal candidate in Argyll.[29] Ranald Findlay, a leading Liberal organiser, reported Bannerman having said that

> if he fights Argyllshire he would like to concentrate as far as possible on our Liberal policy for dealing with the domestic problems of the highlands and islands. He would not, of course, neglect wider issues, but he feels that as a candidate and possibly later as a Member with his already well-established connections with the Highland movement, his advocacy of our policy would carry weight and perhaps produce results.[30]

Perhaps a better opening for Bannerman was the prospect of his being adopted as a joint Liberal/SNP candidate at the Argyll by-election in the spring of 1940. This was a period of electoral truce between the main parties that was generally observed by the Liberals. Bannerman's appearance, under a partial SNP banner in a constituency in which his Gaelic identity would have

[26] George McKechnie, *George Malcolm Thomson, The Best-Hated Man: Intellectuals and the Condition of Scotland Between the Wars* (Glendaruel: Argyll Publishing, 2013), 151–65.
[27] Richard. J. Finlay, '"For or against?": Scottish nationalists and the British Empire', *Scottish Historical Review*, 71 (1992), 184–206.
[28] Richard J. Finlay, *Independent and Free: Scottish Politics and the Origins of the Scottish National Party, 1918–1945* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1994), 143.
[29] Churchill College, Cambridge, Thurso Mss, THRS II, Box 74, Folder 2, Findlay to Sinclair, 19 July 1937, 13 August 1937, 6 September 1937. For a summary of factional divisions within the Liberal Party, a useful timeline of the party's history can be found here (https://libdemnewswire.com/short-history-liberal-sdp-liberal-democrats/, accessed 27 Oct 2024).
[30] Churchill College, Cambridge, Thurso Mss, THRS II, Box 74, Folder 2, Findlay to Sinclair, 10 September 1937.

played strongly, would have allowed the Liberals to have a role in the election without seeming to have broken the truce. At the time, the Argyll seat was held by a Conservative, Frederick MacQuisten. When he died in 1940, the terms of the wartime truce dictated that he be succeeded by a Tory. Bannerman later recalled that he was invited by leading Tories in the county to succeed MacQuisten on the condition that he became a National Liberal, which he declined to do.[31] In the event there was too much Liberal wariness of the SNP, and William Power emerged as an SNP candidate. His performance in a straight fight with a Unionist was the best result yet for a nationalist candidate, and foreshadowed other good wartime performances for the party at Kirkcaldy in 1944 and Motherwell in 1945, where Dr Robert MacIntyre was victorious.

Bannerman's career, therefore, raises the topic of relations between the Liberals and the SNP.[32] As Scottish politics came to be contested almost exclusively by Labour and the Unionists, the Liberals – with their long-standing commitment to Scottish Home Rule – and the SNP seemed often to be in pursuit of the same voters, and experienced similar difficulties in breaking into the duopoly. Both parties tended to perform best outside the industrial central belt; and when they experienced relative electoral success in the 1960s and 1970s, the north and north-east of Scotland were areas of strength.[33] Despite some elements of commonality in their outlook, however, relations between the two parties were often tense. In the 1930s, the correspondence of Liberal Party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair is replete with expressions of irritation at the SNP. In a letter of 1935 to Daniel Stevenson his annoyance was plain:

> Quite frankly I think the Scottish nationalists are difficult people to deal with. Not only have the Liberal party done all the spade work for Home Rule but in recent years and months they have given much help to the National party … The only response from the Nationalists has been vehement attacks in letters to the newspapers and declarations that I had no right to pledge the support of the Liberal Party for Scottish Home Rule.[34]

The Liberals and the SNP made a number of attempts to resolve the differences between them. During the war, negotiations began with a joint meeting in September 1941 at which 'every aspect of propaganda for self-government for Scotland was discussed …'. [35] Little came of this activity, however. More significant was the 'National' candidacy of John MacCormick at Paisley in 1948, although this caused significant controversy in the Liberal Party.[36] Further fruitless contact in 1955 between the Liberals, the SNP and MacCormick's Scottish Covenant Association resulted in the Liberal Executive Committee, with Bannerman in the Chair, agreeing that a line be drawn under the matter.[37] In the 1960s tensions arose again, first in 1964 when the SNP asked if the Liberals would prioritise Scottish Home Rule as a first step towards a new relationship between the two parties. Bannerman argued strongly that the Liberals were part of a wider UK organisation and could not take this step. Later in the decade, proposals put forward by Jo Grimond to tryst with the

[31] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 99.
[32] Torrance, *Scottish Liberals,* 100–6.
[33] Indeed, it might be said that it was the Scottish Parliament election of 2011 before this pattern in the SNP vote was broken. This election also saw a decisive break in the pattern of the 'Liberal' vote in Scotland in that the Liberal Democrats won no constituency seats on the Scottish mainland!
[34] Churchill College, Cambridge, Thurso Mss, Sinclair to Daniel Stevenson, 22 February 1935.
[35] NLS, Acc. 12509/10, Minutes of the National Council of the SNP, 4 October 1941.
[36] Michael Dyer, '"A nationalist in the Churchillian sense": John MacCormick, the Paisley by-election of 18 February 1948, home rule and the crisis in Scottish Liberalism', *Parliamentary History,* 22 (2003), 285–307; Torrance, *Scottish Liberals*, 93.
[37] NLS, Acc. 11765/57, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Scottish Liberal Party, 8 November 1955.

Nationalists stimulated vociferous opposition from Russell Johnston, Liberal MP for Inverness-shire.[38]

Even so, Bannerman did advocate Scottish Home Rule in his election campaigns; indeed, it was his emphasis, along with that of Jo Grimond, on this issue which helped to continue the Scottish Liberal tradition of support for self-government. The importance of Home Rule for Bannerman was evident during his by-election campaign in Inverness in 1954, when he had the vocal support of John M. MacCormick and other leaders of the Scottish Covenant Association – much to the displeasure of the *Inverness Courier*, the main local newspaper, and one which had endorsed him in 1950.[39] The venerable *Courier* railed against Scottish Home Rule as a distraction from important national and international issues.[40] Indeed, Bannerman gave so much attention to the issue in this campaign that one of his supporters had to write to the press to counter the notion that Bannerman was a Scottish nationalist and to emphasise that, as a Liberal, he favoured Home Rule and not separation.[41] Bannerman himself confirmed his position during a campaign speech at Argyll in 1945, where he defined his belief in Home Rule by invoking the spirit of Thomas Johnston – the wartime Secretary of State for Scotland and a figure with cross-party appeal – with his combination of general support for Home Rule and his use of wartime conditions to increase the level of Scottish autonomy over certain domestic issues.[42]

Although Bannerman gave prominence to the Home Rule issue in other campaigns in Inverness at the general elections of 1955 and 1959, the by-election conditions and the prominence of the Covenant Movement meant that it became a headline feature in 1954; so much so, in fact, that Bannerman's campaign attracted a supportive, if somewhat overexcited, article in the *Scots Independent* (an SNP newspaper), which argued that it 'pointed the way to Scottish independence' and was 'a milestone for the National movement'.[43] In the Highlands, the newspaper of the Covenant movement published a tribute to Bannerman which lauded his fight against 'English-controlled' party machines and 'far-off Government Departments'.[44]

Bannerman sought to make Home Rule central to his Liberalism, advocating federalism as a means of controlling one's own destiny in national as well as individual terms.[45] A prominent theme in his later public speeches was the extent to which Scottish Home rule could help to develop Scotland, and by implication the United Kingdom as a whole, transforming it from a 'sleeping partner' to a 'working partner' by countering the centralisation of power at Westminster.[46] Bannerman's espousal of federalism demonstrated the widening gap between his own thinking and that of the SNP, which had just won a spectacular by-election victory at Hamilton and was becoming much clearer and more confident in its advocacy of unqualified independence. The SNP's support for independence at this time not only diverged markedly from the Home Rule endorsed by John MacCormick, but also contrasted with the pragmatism of the SNP itself in the 1930s – the

[38] Graham Watson, 'Scottish Liberals, Scottish Nationalists and Dreams of a Common Front', *Journal of Liberal History*, 22 (Spring, 1999), 3–12; NLS, Acc. 11765/55, Minutes of the General Council of the Scottish Liberal party, 4 June 1966, 3 September 1966.

[39] *Inverness Courier*, 17 Dec. 1954, 8 for an account of a meeting in Inverness at which MacCormick and Grimond spoke in support of Bannerman and emphasised the importance of the Home Rule issue.

[40] *Inverness Courier*, 10 December 1954, 7; 17 December 1954, 6;

[41] *Inverness Courier*, 21 December 1954, 3 for a letter from Kenneth Fraser, Chairman of the Scottish Liberal Association.

[42] *Oban Times*, 16 June 1945, 3.

[43] *Scots Independent*, 1 January 1955, 1.

[44] *Highlands and Islands Covenanter*, July 1950, back page (I found this publication among the papers of Dr Robert MacIntyre: NLS, Acc. 10090/187).

[45] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 287, col. 708, 6 December 1967.

[46] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol.288, col. 735, 30 January 1968.

period of Bannerman's flirtation with it – when phrases such as 'independence in the Empire', or even 'independence in the United Kingdom', had been used.[47]

Despite Bannerman's strong performance as a Liberal supporter of Scottish devolution, his ultimate failure to be elected also reminds us that the condition of Scottish politics in this period was not only strongly unionist but also strongly 'British', with the consequence that it was very difficult for Liberal or SNP candidates to credibly demand Home Rule for Scotland. The apparent success of the Covenant Movement led by John MacCormick is perhaps deceptive here.[48] Although 2 million Scots signed up to the rather vague and general expressions of the Covenant, a more significant statistic is that over 95 percent of Scots voted for Labour or the Unionists in the 1950s, with the Unionists and National Liberals gaining 50.1 percent of the popular vote in 1955. In this unionist age, the Labour party were the more centralist, the Unionists adopting a line of argument, perhaps opportunistic, that Labour policies such as the nationalisation of key industries were anti-Scottish because they concentrated power in London. The Unionists' answer, however, was to augment administrative devolution and invest in the infrastructure of transport and housing.[49] In this context it was very difficult for any supporter of Home Rule, even a strong candidate such as Bannerman, to prosper at elections.

Bannerman and Scottish Liberalism

There was another problem for Bannerman which persisted for most of his political career: the state of the Liberal Party in Scotland. This was a party which had once dominated Scottish politics. Between 1832 and 1910 there was only one election – 1900 – at which the party did not win a majority of Scottish seats. The recovery from 1900 was rapid and, in contrast to the position in England, sustained through the two general elections of 1910. At the outbreak of war in 1914, the party held fifty-nine of the seventy Scottish seats.

The wartime period and the inter-war years, however, brought division and difficulty for the party as it saw electoral support leaking to the Unionists and Labour and the seeming irrelevance of free trade, land reform and international cooperation – its main political ideas. With wartime divisions never properly healed, new divisions emerged over support for the National Government in 1931–2.

By 1932 there were at least two Liberal factions due to the emergence of the National, or 'Simonite', Liberals, who supported the National Government established in 1931. The bitter relations that existed between the two factions were clearly seen in Dingle Foot's description of the National Liberals as 'Vichy Liberals'. The 1930s were extremely difficult for the 'Samuelite' Liberals who sought an independent existence, outside the National Government, as their fortunes declined even in areas of former relative strength for the Liberal party, such as rural Scotland. In the Ross and Cromarty by-election of 1936, difficulty finding a candidate for a seat which had been continuously Liberal since 1832 presaged a very weak performance in an election won by Malcolm MacDonald for National Labour.[50]

With the Liberals observing the electoral truce during the Second World War, Bannerman stood aside in Argyll in 1940.[51] Emerging from the 1945 election with no seats in Scotland, the

[47] Finlay, *Independent and Free*, 162–99.

[48] Malcolm Petrie, 'John MacCormick', in James Mitchell and Gerry Hassan (eds), *Scottish National Party Leaders* (London: Biteback, 2016), 57–61.

[49] Ewen A. Cameron, '*The Bulletin*, "Londonisation" and Scottish politics in the 1940s and 1950s', *Scottish Historical Review*, 103 (2024), 156–77; Ewen A. Cameron, 'The politics of the Union in an age of Unionism, 1920 to 1960' in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Scotland and the Union, 1707 to 2007* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 123–39.

[50] Ewen A. Cameron, 'Rival foundlings: the Ross and Cromarty by-election of February 1936', *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 507–30; see also n. 29 above.

[51] *The Scotsman*, 2 March 1940, 8; 4 March 1940, 5; 30 March 1940, 11; Fowler, *Bannerman*, 99.

Liberal Party faced very difficult conditions as, despite desultory attempts to reunite the factions, the National Liberals moved ever closer to the Conservatives and acted in concert with them at elections.[52] Thus the post-war Liberal context in which Bannerman was fighting was a very difficult one, in which the party struggled to find its identity. Was it a progressive party or an 'anti-socialist' party? Was there, frankly, a future for an independent Liberal Party in this period when the Unionists and Labour were so dominant?

There was, however, a deeper problem for the Liberals. If they were to base their appeal on anti-socialism, which they did in their emphasis on the individual and their opposition to nationalisation, they faced the problem of competing with the Unionists for the anti-socialist vote – a contest which they could only lose, given the gulf in resources and the extent to which the Unionists had a well-worked out position on these questions.[53] Indeed, the Unionists refused even to refer to 'Labour', with officials urging Unionist candidates to use the term 'socialist' to 'debunk "Labour"'.[54] Bannerman's attempt to combine support for Scottish Home Rule with an anti-socialist position met with some success, but not enough to win him a seat. The dramatic decline of a once hegemonic party in Scotland is demonstrable from party records: in December 1946 a thirty-seater coach had been hired to take delegates from the East of Scotland to the meeting of the General Council at Perth – but the booking had to be cancelled as only eight seats were reserved![55]

At this low point, the party relied on a small group of committed activists, with John MacCormick, Lady Glen-Coats and John Bannerman among the most prominent. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, there was an internal debate about the future of the party and an attempt to reconstitute and re-launch the party with a clearer Scottish identity.[56] An *ad hoc* committee, established under the convenorship of John MacCormick, recommended a new constitution for a reorganised party to be known as the 'Scottish Liberal Party', rather than the archaic 'Scottish Liberal Federation'. The renaming was an attempt to rebuild the Liberal party after the defeat at the general election of 1945, and to recognise that the old assumption that there were active Liberals in associations all over Scotland was no longer relevant.[57] During this debate, Bannerman took the view that an inclusive approach – 'a drive to bring in those people who have been alienated or in the wilderness from Liberalism' – should be a central element of the reconstituted Scottish party.[58] In attempting to establish the identity of the party in 1946, policy resolutions were drafted under Bannerman's guidance which sought to adhere to traditional Liberal principles while ensuring their relevance in the current political context. Devolution was thus presented as an antidote to the centralisation brought about by the nationalisation of industry (an argument also used by Unionists at this time), and policies on 'decentralisation' and 'bureaucratic control' were refashioned to take account of the terms of political debate in the post-war period:

> The Liberal Party in Scotland believe there exists a grave danger to the community in the ideas underlying all proposals for a so-called planned economy. Such proposals will place in the hands of Government departments the power to control the whole life of the community,

[52] Michael Dyer, 'The evolution of the Centre-right and the state of Scottish Conservatism', *Political Studies,* 49 (2002), 42.

[53] Malcolm Petrie, *Politics and the People: Scotland, 1945–79* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 26–32; Cameron, **'***The Bulletin,* "Londonisation" and Scottish politics in the 1940s and 1950s', 156–77.

[54] Bodleian Library, Conservative Party Archive, CCO 2/1/17, Memorandum from Col Blair, to Scottish candidates and election agents, 13 February 1950.

[55] NLS, Acc. 11765/53, Minutes of the General Council, 7 December 1946

[56] Torrance, *Scottish Liberals,* 84–8.

[57] NLS, Acc. 11765/14/330–8, Meeting of the Executive, 21 Nov. 1945; 11765/14/354, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Scottish Liberal Federation, 15 March 1946.

[58] NLS, Acc. 11765/14/348, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Scottish Liberal Federation, 15 March 1946.

> and to dictate the conditions under which individuals will live. With this danger in view, we urge the removal of the restrictions upon Enterprise, Production and Trade, and the return of the government to its proper role of guaranteeing equality of opportunity to all citizens.[59]

Despite its concerted effort to re-brand, the party faced considerable difficulties in this period. Not only was money extremely tight, but the party's reliance on a core group of activists placed an enormous personal burden on people like MacCormick, Bannerman and the redoubtable (and wealthy) Lady Glen-Coats. Of further – and more fundamental – concern was the condition of Scottish politics in this period. Although the Liberals attempted to counter the arguments of the dominant Labour government, they struggled to assert their political identity in a period when only a relatively small number of Liberal candidates could be found, the Scottish Unionist Party advocated similar ideas on decentralisation, and the Liberals' anti-socialist message was effectively drowned out.[60]

Addressing questions about the Liberal Party's purpose and identity were central to its efforts to restore its position on the Scottish political landscape. Some of these problems can be seen in Bannerman's by-election campaign for the Scottish Universities' seat in 1946. Having first been approached to stand as an independent candidate, he declined, stating that he preferred to stand as a Liberal. Despite the fact that this election, occasioned by the resignation of John Boyd Orr, took place in the midst of reunion negotiations with the Liberal Nationals, the picture was complicated by the Liberal Nationals themselves putting forward a candidate – Robert Scott Stevenson, who came fifth. Nevertheless, Bannerman was clear that it was important for the Liberals to stand in order to try to establish their identity: 'we in Scotland have to make our stand for pure Liberalism and the sooner we do it the better'[61]. He later added that 'he would stand as a pure Liberal and that he would be diametrically opposed to Liberal-Nationalism and all it stands for', making clear that this, to him, was more important than Liberal reunion.[62] Given the weakness of the Liberals at this time, although this might have been difficult to assess in the rather unusual electorate in the Universities seat, it was felt that Bannerman was merely a 'candidate for a consolation prize'.[63] Despite his strong criticism of the Tories and advocacy for a Scottish Parliament, Bannerman was heavily defeated in an election won by former Secretary of State for Scotland, Walter Elliot.[64] In the aftermath, Bannerman was quoted in *The Scotsman*:

> I am aware that the Tory Party, shocked by its own defeat, is now beginning to adopt many of the proposals of the Liberals … But it is the same old Tory party which by its reactionary policies when in power, made inevitable the landslide towards Socialism. Unless its new found and still very tentative approach towards a more Liberal outlook is hastened by the return of independent Liberals to Parliament, there is little hope that this country will be saved from the totalitarianism which is the ultimate goal of state socialism.[65]

Interestingly, in this comment Bannerman not only asserted the intellectual vitality of Liberalism but also tried to establish the independence of the Liberal message. Although he emphasised anti-socialism, he was equally critical of the Unionists and implicitly rejected the notion of independent

[59] NLS, Acc. 11765/14/349-50, Minute of the Meeting of the Resolutions Committee, 15 February 1946.
[60] Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled on a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 271–7; Matthew Cragoe, '"We like local patriotism": the Conservative party and the discourse of decentralisation, 1947–51', *English Historical Review*, 122 (2007), 965–85.
[61] NLS, Acc. 11765/56, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 8 October 1946.
[62] NLS, Acc. 11765/56, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 1 November 1946; Torrance, *Scottish Liberals*, 89.
[63] *The Scotsman*, 15 November 1946, 4.
[64] *The Scotsman*, 15 November 1946, 6.
[65] *The Scotsman*, 15 Nov. 1946, 6.

Liberalism as part of an anti-socialist coalition – a grouping in which the Liberals could only ever be a junior and faintly heard partner.

These issues were evident throughout Bannerman's political career, but perhaps especially so in the 1950s. In his first campaign in Inverness in 1950, the identity of Liberalism was an issue. There was no incumbent; Sir Murdoch MacDonald, who had held the seat since 1922, had eventually retired – and decided to endorse Bannerman as his replacement. This was an interesting development for several reasons. MacDonald had been one of the first Liberals to go into the opposition lobby along with Sir John Simon in 1931, and he had been part of the 'secret conclave' of twenty-two 'Simonite Liberals' in October 1931.[66] In 1942, he resigned from the Liberal National group and stood in the 1945 election as an 'Independent Liberal pledged to support Mr Churchill', thereby avoiding the complication of a Conservative opponent.[67]

In 1950 Bannerman, although clearly an independent Liberal 'without prefix or suffix', presented himself first and foremost as an anti-socialist candidate. His campaign emphasised his opposition to nationalisation, his support for privatisation of the iron and steel industry, and his belief in making the 'fullest use of private enterprise in rehousing the people'.[68] MacDonald supported him, despite the fact that he deplored Bannerman's commitment to Scottish Home Rule. *The Inverness Courier*, despite worrying that the anti-socialist vote (there was a strong Labour candidate in 1950) would be split, saw Bannerman as the most likely candidate to defeat the Socialist, and they were pleased that he had given a 'solemn pledge that he is utterly opposed to Socialism and to further nationalisation and that he would not be party to placing the Socialists back in power, and no anti-socialist vote would be wasted if it is cast for him'.[69] In the end, however, the contest was won by the Unionist, Sir Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, while Bannerman came bottom of the poll, although with a relatively healthy twenty-two percent of the vote.

When Douglas-Hamilton resigned four years later, Bannerman stood in the 1954 Inverness by-election, where he gained thirty-six percent of the vote. In the General Election the following year, he won thirty-eight percent of the vote, cutting the Unionist majority to less than a thousand; Bannerman ascribed his defeat to the 'impersonal fanatical' use by the Unionists of the postal vote – which amounted to 1,079. As many party historians have recognised, Bannerman's performances in these two elections, in which he campaigned on the issue of Home Rule, were striking in a very difficult period for the Liberals.[70] Bannerman's success was also heralded at the time by Liberal newspapers, although it was noted that his personality, suitability for the particular constituency and 'championship of Scottish Home Rule' were not features that could be repeated, or that readily translated to other seats.[71]

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[66] David Dutton, *Liberals in Schism: A History of the National Liberal Party* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 34, 39–40

[67] *The Times*, 18 Mar. 1942, 8; Dutton, *Liberals in Schism*, 135; James Miller, *Inverness* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), 284, 303, 310; Dyer, 'The evolution of the Centre-right', 42.

[68] *Inverness Courier*, 7 February 1950, 3.

[69] *Inverness Courier*, 21 February 1950, 2; see also 13 January 1950, 4; 24 January 1950, 2; 31 January 1950, 2; 7 February 1950, 2; 14 February 1950, 2; this election was a further occasion in the long-running political battle in Inverness between *The Inverness Courier*, a newspaper with a Liberal tradition, and the *Northern Chronicle* which had been established as a Conservative title in 1881; see Ewen A. Cameron, 'John Murdoch, Duncan Campbell and Victorian journalism in the Highlands of Scotland', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40 (2007), 281–306; and Ewen A. Cameron, 'Radicalism and Conservatism in the press of the Scottish Highlands: the *Highlander* and the *Northern Chronicle*', *Northern Scotland*, 27 (2007), 117–29.

[70] Roy Douglas, *Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), 260; David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 181; Alun Wyburn-Powell, 'The Inverness Turning-Point', *Journal of Liberal History*, 53 (Winter, 2006–7), 18-25.

[71] *Manchester Guardian*, 24 December 1954, 1.

In the 1960s, the question of Liberal identity became more straightforward as the post-war period progressed and the National Liberals moved closer to the Unionists, with whom they formally merged in 1968.[72] Indeed, by the time of Bannerman's campaigns in Paisley in 1961 and 1964, the Unionist consensus was beginning to fray at the edges as the SNP and Liberals placed more candidates and secured a number of better results.[73] This period saw a number of spectacular Liberal victories at by-elections, notably Torrington in Devon and Orpington in Kent in 1962. These, and other good performances, heralded talk of a 'Liberal revival' prior to the 1964 election.[74]

In the Paisley by-election of 1961, Bannerman himself stood following the last-moment withdrawal of the established candidate. As Chairman of the Scottish Liberal Party, he had advocated a policy of fighting by-elections, and felt that he should intervene rather than see the seat uncontested by a Liberal.[75] Nevertheless, even in this slightly different context, Liberal intervention was seen not on its own terms but perceived as a possible distorting factor. Under the headline, 'Will Labour dissidents help to return a Unionist?', the political correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald* argued that votes for Bannerman could potentially erode the Labour vote and lead to the return of a Unionist in a seat with a strong Liberal tradition and a recent history of Labour representation.[76]

In this election, Bannerman's message was that the Unionists were failing Scottish voters. Harold MacMillan's optimistic economic rhetoric was viewed with scepticism in Scotland, where unemployment was creeping up, although still low by the standards of the 1930s or the 1980s. The Unionists were dogged by opposition to recent budget proposals raising payroll tax and increasing the rate of the surtax – issues which allowed Bannerman to argue that the Unionists were discriminating against Scotland. Mrs Thatcher (elected two years earlier as MP for Finchley) might have taken note of this Paisley campaign, where the Unionists were drawing criticism for overseeing a revaluation of rateable values that was unique to Scotland.[77] These issues have generally been accepted as explaining a very poor showing by the Unionists, whose support slumped to 13.2 percent of the vote, compared to 42.7 percent at the 1959 General Election two years earlier. Labour held the seat, but Bannerman surged to a very strong second place with 41.4 percent. He stood again at the General Election of 1964, once more coming second with a highly respectable 33.9 percent of the vote.[78]

An examination of Bannerman's Liberalism allows us to gain a better understanding of the party's slow progress in the period from 1945 to the mid-1960s. Recovering from the splits of the inter-war period, the Liberal Party began to assert a more straightforward political identity as the Liberal Nationals withered and moved closer to the Conservatives, and as Jo Grimond presided over an increase in the party's vitality. Bannerman was certainly in the vanguard of this movement in Scotland, especially with his striking results in Inverness in 1954 – by far the best performance in a post-war by-election up to that date – and Paisley in 1961.

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[72] Graham D. Goodlad, 'The Liberal-Nationals, 1931–40: the problems of a party in "partnership government"', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), 133–43; David Dutton, 'Sir John Simon and the post-war National Liberal Party: an historical postscript', *Historical Journal*, 32 (1989), 357–67.

[73] Petrie, *Politics and the People*, 55–66.

[74] Ken Young, 'Orpington and the "Liberal revival"', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds), *By-elections in British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 157–79; Pippa Norris, 'The rise (and fall?) of multi-party by-election politics', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 44 (1991), 298–310.

[75] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 112–13.

[76] *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1961, 6.

[77] *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1961, 7.

[78] Paisley was won by the Labour candidate, John Robertson, who held the seat until 1979 although he resigned from the Labour party in 1976 and participated with Jim Sillars in the quasi-nationalist Scottish Labour Party, which was critical of the weakness of Labour's devolution plans.

In the 1960s and 1970s, signs of Liberal recovery began to yield more tangible results with the General Elections of 1964 and 1966 and by-elections of this period, although the Liberal gains in Ross-shire and Caithness and Sutherland were short-lived. Russell Johnston, however, took Inverness in 1964 and held it until his retirement in 1997. More progress was made in the complicated elections of 1974, although the SNP stole some of the third-party thunder on that occasion as their vote grew to over thirty percent.

Bannerman and the Highlands

A final area to examine is the extent to which Bannerman contributed to the debate on the position of the Highlands in a period when that issue was not so prominent as it had been in earlier periods of Scottish politics. In the 1940s and 1950s, Bannerman strongly emphasised his Gaelic identity in Argyll and Inverness, often making speeches and, no doubt, interacting with individual voters in Gaelic. His campaigns included ceilidhs at which he performed – a feature occasionally sneered at by his opponents in the press in Inverness-shire and by metropolitan political commentators. To the extent that Liberalism survived in Scotland after 1918, the Highlands were an important area of support, although, as we have seen, even here the party faced difficulties following the creation of the National Government and the disastrous election of 1935.

In the election of 1950, when the *Inverness Courier* supported Bannerman as the strongest anti-socialist candidate – and this was crucial in understanding politics in this period – the paper attempted to argue that Inverness-shire had a strong Liberal tradition. While it was the case that Murdoch MacDonald had held the seat since 1922 under every conceivable Liberal label – Coalition Liberal (at his by-election victory just before the collapse of the coalition), National Liberal, Liberal (National Liberal), National Liberal, National Liberal (Independent Liberal) and, in 1945, Independent Liberal – the *Courier* was slightly disingenuous in making this claim, referring in a rather literal way only to the seat as it was then constituted, taking the tradition back only to 1918, and avoiding some inconvenient Conservative representation in earlier periods. Characterising the Tories as agents of the landlords who had despoiled the Highlands in the nineteenth century, the paper asserted that

> in the eyes of the average crofter and country dweller throughout the Highland area generally, and in Inverness-shire in particular, the word Tory is synonymous with the landlords who evicted thousands of Highland people in order to make way for sheep, deer and grouse.[79]

Justifying its support for Bannerman's candidacy as far preferable to that of the Unionist, the *Courier* argued:

> We ourselves object particularly to his Home Rule views, but these are of not the slightest practical importance at the present time and can safely be ignored. On the other hand Mr Bannerman is a good Highlander with a first-hand knowledge of Highland conditions and Highland problems, and from the purely Highland point of view, therefore, much more suited to represent a Highland constituency in the House of Commons than his Tory opponent, Lord Malcolm Douglas Hamilton.[80]

At other points Highland traditions of political representation were used against Bannerman, not least in his 1954 and 1955 campaigns, in which he advocated Scottish Home Rule. On these occasions, the *Courier* argued that centralisation of power in Edinburgh would be even worse for the Highlands than centralisation of power in London. Highland MPs would be significantly outnumbered, and would lose out to Lowland Scottish interests in a way that did not happen in

[79] *Inverness Courier*, 17 February 1950, 4.
[80] *Inverness Courier*, 31 January 1950, 2.

London. Similar arguments had been used against the home-rule supporting Crofter MPs in the 1885 and 1886 elections.[81]

The *Courier* occasionally appeared to change its mind. Having criticised 'Tory' opposition to the hydro-schemes in the 1930s, the paper later embraced the Unionists when they seemed the likelier anti-socialist vehicle, describing the wartime coalition as a Conservative-led government that had delivered important improvements to the Highlands – such as the creation of the Hydro-Board. As regards Scotland and the Highlands in particular, the paper drew a distinction between 'bigotted Tories' who disparaged the Highlands, and the 'Unionists as a whole', who did not – an interesting reminder that the nomenclature of the Scottish Unionist Party, devoid of the 'Conservative' label, could be useful in Scotland.[82]

The *Courier*'s apparent tergiversations can be understood by thinking about the power of anti-socialism in Scottish politics at this time. In the 1950s, the paper's commitment to anti-socialism informed their deep veneration for Churchill and his Cold-War politics. In 1954, Bannerman was problematic for them because a strong vote for him risked a Socialist victory on a minority poll. Conversely, in Paisley in 1961 and 1964 Bannerman was standing as a candidate for a seat with a very conscious radical heritage going back to the nineteenth century – hence the worry for Labour supporters that Bannerman's intervention in 1961 would lead to a Unionist victory.[83] In an age of two-party politics, the Liberal Party's third-party status was a perennial problem for them. It would be the 1970s, when they were able to field candidates in every seat, before they gained national credibility.

Bannerman's political career straddled an interesting period in the history of government policy for the Highlands, and his ideas about how to deal with the Highland problem were the subject of many of his speeches in his brief period in the House of Lords. In the 1940s, he had actively supported the Knoydart land raiders who, in 1948, had sought to draw attention not only to the egregious landlordism of Lord Brocket, but also to the Labour Party's neglect of the Highland land question.[84] Bannerman used the Knoydart episode to illustrate his points about the neglect of the Highlands and the extent to which centralisation of government meant that 'the injustice continues towards the remoter areas'.[85] But while Liberals like Bannerman and nationalists like Robert Macintyre used the raid to argue that the land-settlement policies of the inter-war period ought to be revived, this was never likely to happen. Official thinking about the Highlands had changed profoundly since the 1930s, shifting away from land-tenure-based policies in favour of ideas that supported the diversification of the region's economy.[86] In an interesting speech in the House of Lords in February 1968, Bannerman asked about the extent of land settlement in the period since

[81] *Inverness* Courier, 21 December 1954, 2; 26 November 1885, 4; for a later generation of Liberals involved in devolution campaigns a proportional voting system for a Scottish parliament was the answer to this problem, see Charles Kennedy, 'The Highland question', in Owen Dudley Edwards (ed.), *A Claim of Right for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), 89-90. Highland anti-devolution sentiment was prominent in the campaign for devolution in the 1974-9 period, notably in the *West Highland Free Press* (see 1 December 1978, 19 January, 16 February, 16 March 1979) owned and edited by Brian Wilson, a Labour MP from 1987 to 2005.

[82] *Inverness Courier*, 31 January 1950, 2; 'Tory Lords and Highland People', *Inverness Courier*, 3 February 1950, 4.

[83] Catriona M. M. MacDonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland, Paisley Politics, 1885 to 1924*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001).

[84] Ewen A. Cameron, 'The Seven Men of Knoydart and the Scottish Highlands in the 1940s', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 62 (2001–3), 156–83

[85] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 124.

[86] Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? The British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1880–1925* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), 191–204.

1945, and was informed that the number of people settled on the four estates which the government had acquired since 1945 was thirty-four. Bannerman responded:

> May I ask the noble Lord whether the Government consider that this is a record to be proud of – 34 people settled on an area of land which is half the size of Scotland: 9 million acres? And have they still the same policy they had in 1947, when seven crofters of Moidart (sic) asked for one extra acre and the Government were unsympathetic.

Lord Hughes' response indicated the extent to which the Labour government were determined to implement what they saw as 'modern' policies (even if their roots lay in the 1930s). He suggested that land settlement, as a policy, was 'not valid', and that the government did not 'rely on methods which had proved a failure in the past'.[87]

The Labour government which had returned to power in 1964 was quick to demonstrate its commitment to economic change in the Highlands by establishing the Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1965. In the 1940s, Bannerman had criticised the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board's initial emphasis on providing power for electro-chemical and metallurgical industries.[88] In the late 1960s, Bannerman, now ennobled, voiced his objection to the Labour government's plan to assist private enterprise, in the shape of Alcan, in establishing an aluminium smelter at Invergordon in Easter Ross. He memorably asked, 'what will it profit the Highlands if it gain an Alcan heart and lose its own soul?' – a remark that is good shorthand for his ideas on the development of the Highlands in the late 1960s – and went on to argue that the region contained 'one million acres, undeveloped and bracken covered, which, after survey and reclamation, could be allocated to the production of folk and food and timber'.[89]

In a later debate on the reform of the crofting system – a very controversial issue in the late 1960s – he developed this theme, arguing that policies to 'increase the stability in crofting' would help to 'increase and develop the stability of indigenous working on the land, of the small man'.[90] This was a conventional line of argument, articulated by many advocates of the crofting system since its establishment by a Liberal government in 1886. The notion was that ensuring security of tenure for the crofter would encourage investment, and the croft could then become a base for other forms of employment, thereby retaining population in a region where conventional, full-time jobs were not especially plentiful. Similarly, Bannerman saw the development of forestry on land with less agricultural potential as another means of creating employment and thus preventing depopulation.

Bannerman was very much in the mainstream of the debate on the Highlands in the late 1960s. While the Labour government, with the establishment of its Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1965, clearly preferred economic development to land-tenure-based solutions to the region's problems, Labour presented this policy in a manner designed to capitalise on the emotional place that the Highlands occupied in Scotland's national identity. Attempting to stamp the authority of his party and government on the debate, Secretary of State Willie Ross declared that the 'Highlander was the man on Scotland's conscience'.[91] Bannerman's view of the HIDB was that it should be empowered to 'settle the people on the land and make agriculture and forestry the twin pillars of reconstruction in the Highlands'.[92] It is striking that in this area of policy – in contrast to much of his rhetoric on other subjects, such as housing, and Liberal ideology generally –

[87] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol.289, cols 1-2, 13 February 1968.
[88] John M. Bannerman, 'Post-war development of the Highlands and islands', *Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow*, 69 (1944–5), 67–8.
[89] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 287, col. 706, 6 December 1967.
[90] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 295, col. 218, 16 July 1968; see also vol. 289, col. 1273, 5 March 1968 for a similar point.
[91] *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 708, col. 1095, 16 March 1965.
[92] *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 291, col. 1104, 1 May 1968.

Bannerman was content to see the state, in the shape of the HIDB, the Forestry Commission and the North of Scotland Hydro-Electricity Board, undertake the bulk of the work for the renovation of the Highlands.

Conclusion

Bannerman felt that in many ways he was not cut out for politics, possessing an insufficiently thick skin and strongly resenting personal attacks by unsubstantiated rumour which he felt were spread on occasion by his opponents, especially the Unionists in Inverness-shire during the campaigns of the 1950s.[93] This was a view echoed by Jo Grimond who wondered whether Bannerman was a 'natural politician'.[94]

When Bannerman entered politics in the 1930s, partisan politics were characterised by coalitions, splits and a degree of realignment. Within this fluid environment, Bannerman could move across the different nationalist factions without compromising his position in the independent Liberals. In the post-war period, the political environment hardened into something increasingly bipolar and became a context that was more difficult for those – like Bannerman and John MacCormick – who took a broader view, who sought to reach out beyond party lines and articulate a more 'personal' political message. It is, perhaps, no surprise that Bannerman had his best electoral performances in the Highlands in the 1950s, a political space in which partisanship had not yet become polarised.

Bannerman performed a very important political role for the Liberal party in Scotland. He was firmly committed to independent Liberalism, as opposed to the 'National' variant that moved towards the Unionists in the 1950s. He was one of a small group of committed activists who were prepared to work for the party at a time when it was at a low ebb. He was prepared to be a candidate, to identify himself as a Liberal without any hyphens or additional adjectives, and to articulate the ideas of the party at a time when it was short of coverage and publicity. When the Liberal Party began to recover in the 1960s, although Bannerman was not able to secure a seat in the House of Commons, the Scottish Highlands, where he had fought five campaigns, were an important site of revival. Inverness-shire, the seat that he had nursed through the 1950s, was the scene of a Liberal victory in 1964 – and the seat was held until 1997.

Central to Bannerman's Liberalism was his strong belief in Scottish Home Rule. In the 1950s, this issue did not have the prominence in Scottish political debate that it would later gain. This was a period in which unionism dominated Scottish politics, with the Labour Party articulating a very centrist position and deprecating any discussion of Scottish Home Rule. The Unionist Party, while they paid more attention to Scottish sensitivities in their rhetoric, adopted administrative, rather than parliamentary, devolution as a policy. In common with other Liberals like John MacCormick, Bannerman helped to keep Scottish Home Rule in the Liberal manifesto, thus ensuring that it remained part of Scottish political debate, even if only marginally so. As recent rhetoric shows, Bannerman is very much part of the political memory of Scottish devolution and Liberalism.

Author's Note

This article was developed from a paper given to one of the Bannerman Seminars at the University of Edinburgh. These seminars, and an annual lecture, are named after Dr John W. M. Bannerman, the son of the subject of this paper. Dr Bannerman was my colleague at the University of Edinburgh in the early part of my career. He was a distinguished historian of early medieval Scotland and had a keen interest in modern Scottish politics, all matters relating to the Gàidhealtachd, and sheep

[93] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 111.
[94] Fowler, *Bannerman*, 12.

farming – issues which I had the great pleasure of discussing with him on many occasions over morning coffee in 17 Buccleuch Place.[95]

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[95] Dauvit Broun and Martin MacGregor, 'Obituary: Dr John W. M. Bannerman, 1932–2008', *Scottish Historical Review* 88 (2009), 3–8.

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