

PRESS REPORTS OF THE BOROUGH ELECTIONS

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Tuesday 9 May 1978

First Liberal Elected For Seven Years

LABOUR STRENGTH REDUCED IN NEW COUNCIL SET-UP

Harrow Liberals won their first seat for seven years at last week's Borough Council elections at which the Conservatives retained control of the Council with an increased majority. The final score for the 21 wards was: Conservatives 46, Labour 12, Ratepayers 4 and Liberals 1. This conclusion was not reached until 5.30 on Friday afternoon following re-counts in Headstone South, Roxbourne and Marlborough wards.....

In winning his seat in Headstone South ward, the Liberal candidate Mr. Stephen Giles-Medhurst defeated Miss Jill Gould, who was chairman of the Council's Social Services Committee, by 23 votes. Mr. Giles-Medhurst is possibly the youngest Councillor in the country, for his 21st birthday coincided with the last day on which candidates could be nominated. "I am very pleased," he said on Friday afternoon after the re-counts at the Civic Centre which followed Thursday's count at the Leisure Centre.....

Also elected in Headstone South was Mr. Edward Buckle, Leader of the Council, who said, "I am very delighted at the general results and especially at winning a seat in Marlborough" He was sorry that Miss Gould had been defeated and he paid tribute to her work.

Referring to Miss Gould's defeat, Mrs. Audrey Barker, Conservative agent for Harrow Central and East said, "Miss Gould will be an inestimable loss to the Council and the Borough, not least for her work as Chairman of the Social Services Committee. The loss of her seat is due to deficiencies in organisation for which I, as her election agent, take sole responsibility. I would like to thank the Returning Officer and his staff for the patience and good humour with which they have conducted the re-counts, and indeed the whole of this complicated election procedure, and I wish to thank also the staff of the Civic Centre, and Police, and the Press who were kept up so late on Thursday night."

Mr. Cyril Harrison, leader of the Council's Labour Group, said although Labour had only won 12 seats it was not such a big disappointment as might be expected. The Labour Group had only expected to win 15 seats, he said — and three they failed to win were in Roxbourne and Marlborough. What was encouraging, he said, was that he had been told that in the Harrow Central constituency area there had been a 1.2% swing towards Labour. "This must be regarded as satisfactory," Mr. Harrison said. "The pattern is very much the way I thought it would be....."

The 72,993 ballot papers started arriving in the Byron Hall at Harrow's Leisure Centre soon after the close of poll at 9 pm, but the majority of results were not announced until 1 am, and it was nearly 3 am before it was decided to hold second re-counts on Friday afternoon.

During Thursday night candidates, counters and spectators had to contend with a hot and arid atmosphere which prompted Mr. Anthony Grant, MP for Harrow Central to say, "We have spent millions on this place, but can you get a glass of water? Can you hell!"

Ballot Papers "Fracas"

The discovery of ballot papers which had not been stamped with an official mark, bedevilled the second re-count of votes for the Roxbourne ward. The papers without the official mark were judged to be invalid and their discovery could have contributed to the defeat, by three votes, of Mr. Kerry Underwood, one of the Labour candidates.

Mr. Dick Beech, acting Harrow West Labour Party agent during Friday afternoon said on Monday about the re-count: "There was a bit of a fracas one way and another, and what we are doing is calling a special emergency meeting of Harrow West Labour Party on Wednesday night to discuss the situation further."

He said they would be discussing this and "other implications" and added: "There were certain other discrepancies we felt took place, but we are not prepared to elaborate on it at this stage."

Ballot papers have to be punched with an official mark by presiding officers at the polling stations, and during the re-count on Friday it was found that with some of the papers this had not been done. After the re-count had been completed there were long discussions between election officers, candidates and agents before it was agreed to scrutinise each ballot paper again to see if they had the official mark.

Mr. Beech told the *Observer*: "Four of our votes were taken out on the second re-count, votes which would have given us a majority of one which would have been the same situation that we had on the previous re-count on Thursday evening."

Mr. Raymond Hill, the Returning Officer, said of the unmarked papers, "The presiding officers omitted to put the official mark onto a number of ballot papers. These votes were adjudicated to be invalid."

Extracts from the *Harrow Midweek*, Tuesday 11 May 1982

Victory Smile As Voters Give The Tories Election Walkover

COLLAPSE OF THE SDP

Harrow Tories are celebrating a triumph at the polls which only the bravest of them would have dared to predict. SDP dreams were shattered and Labour hopes effortlessly crushed in a Conservative victory on almost the same scale as their landslide success of four years ago. Of the Tories' opponents, only the Liberals came out of the battle with honour - pushing Labour firmly into third place.

The final result after two cliff-hanger re-counts came on Friday afternoon: Conservative 41 seats, Liberals 13, Labour 6 and Ratepayers 3. The Conservatives suffered only one major upset: they lost all three seats in Harrow Weald to the Liberals. The Tories knew that victory was theirs in the early hours of Friday morning. Re-counts in Stanmore South and Ridgeway in the afternoon added another five seats to bring the Conservative total to 41 — just one seat less than they had before.

For the SDP the election was a disaster. Not a single SDP candidate was elected and inevitable questions were being raised about the future of the Alliance in Harrow.

Council leader Brian Clark said after Thursday's late-night count: "When you consider that we started with 42 seats, I think we have done very well in mid-term Government.... I hoped to do as well as this. I was forecasting a minimum of 36 and probable somewhere around 39." Cllr. Clark — in common with spokesmen for the other parties — said that the Falkland Islands crisis influenced the voting to a certain extent. But he said the Council's record over the past four years helped as well.

Liberal Party spokesman Cllr. Ralph Bancroft said: "I think we are satisfied with the result in that where we thought we had a chance of winning, we did, in fact, get some people in. We were surprised by the strength of the Tory vote, which was reflected right across the Borough, but there were 'special factors' operating. We were fighting an election in the middle of a war, and inevitably voters are going to rally around the Government at a time like this."

SDP agent Peter Fletcher said: "The electorate have voted an opinion poll on the Falklands situation. We expected to do better. Our campaigning and our canvassing response gave us good reason toexpect it, but over the last three days we noticed a definite hardening. I'd have hoped we'd have kept Kenton East and been in the running for a couple more at least...."

Labour leader Cyril Harrison said he was surprised at the strength of the Conservative vote. He said the Government "had bungled over the Falklands causing the Foreign Secretary to resign", had a "disastrous economic policy nationally" and the Council had been inept in its handling of local affairs. "At least some areas — like Wealdstone — still retain some measure of sanity," he said....

VICTORY — AND MASSACRE

Tension As Re-counts End The Battle At The Polls

Sir Harold Wilson once said that a week was a long time in politics. For the hundreds of people in the Byron Hall on Thursday night, a few hours seemed like an eternity. The first result was due in around 11.30 pm.

It came, in fact, at about one in the morning. There had been numerous false alarms before Returning Officer Donald Wickens finally stepped up onto the podium and named the first victors.

Rosette-bearing candidates, agents and party workers bustled about, peering anxiously over the shoulders of the tellers sifting through the piles of voting slips. Council leader Brian Clark wore an expression of quiet confidence. Labour leader Cyril Harrison, in his red 'Give Harrow a Heart' T-shirt, looked serious. The evening was not to be a nice one for Cyril....

Crowds clustered around the tables as the votes for Harrow Weald, Ridgeway and Stanmore South were re-counted. Harrow Weald was settled by one re-count, but the other two were finally resolved by a further re-count each the following afternoon.

By Thursday night, however, it was already over for Harrow's newest political party. Even before the first result came through, SDP members were muttering darkly about being "massacred."

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Thursday 15 May 1986

TORIES JUST SQUEEZE IN

The Conservatives have narrowly retained control of Harrow Council — with a majority of just one. Their comfortable pre-poll majority of 15 vanished as the Liberal Alliance and Labour captured 7 seats, producing some heart-stopping moments for Council leader Donald Abbott. The final result was Conservatives 32 seats, Liberals 18, Labour 9 and Ratepayers 4....

A neck-and-neck race in Wealdstone provided an election cliff-hanger. Candidates had to wait four days and endure five re-counts before it was settled. When the result was announced on Monday evening it was the last in the country, and saw Labour lose one of its three supposedly safe seats to Liberal Thrity Shroff by three votes. It took three re-counts to settle the three-party battle in Roxbourne.

Informed sources say the Tories have already taken tactical steps to safeguard their vulnerable majority. Although the political make-up of committees will be split almost evenly, it is said the Tories will push through measures enabling them to send an ex-officio team of senior members to committee meetings. Team members, with voting powers, will ensure group policy is approved. One senior Tory said this week: "We aim to change the rules to ensure we get through the business. I'm sure the other parties would do the same if they were in our position."

Night Of The Long Count

It was nearly three o'clock as the elated, disappointed and plain fed-up drifted away from the count — and Council leader Donald Abbott opened his bottle of bubbly. The former Army major arrived with victory rations concealed in a cold box — quietly confident but noticeably not cocksure. He was serious-faced, and often pensive, for parts of the labourious count, so often an anti-climax. But the familiar broad grin finally broke out when he realised the Tories had an overall majority, even if it was by the narrowest possible margin of one seat.

His troops were battle-scarred but unbroken and unbeaten, and that was all that mattered. It was clear, however, that the celebration drink contained more sparkle than the Tories' performance. Their comfortable pre-election majority of 15 — inflated by victories in the so-called 'Falklands factor' distorted poll of 1982 — was whittled away equally by the Liberals and Labour.

Some Tories privately predicted beforehand that they would experience a slump in fortunes. Donald Abbott was talking of a lead of four. His forecast seemed spot on until the Liberals unexpectedly captured Rayners Lane — the upset of the night.

Sitting Tory councillor Joan Kirk left the count in tears before the result was announced.... Donald Abbott admitted he was surprised at the shock result — and Chris Noyce, one of the winning Liberal trio, admitted he was too. A measure of his confidence at winning, he confessed, could be gauged by the fact that he had spent the day knocking-up potential Alliance supporters in neighbouring Roxbourne.

After the initial clamour had died down, the Tories announced they were considering querying the Alliance's

election expenses in Rayners Lane, their concern fostered by an apparent deluge of eve-of-poll Alliance literature. Their only immediate consolation was when they picked up the third seat from the Liberals in Ridgeway with a majority of more than 150. The Alliance had firmly pinned its hope on capturing the ward.

In once true-blue Pinner, sole Independent Ratepayer James Bond increased his October 1984 by-election majority to take first place, leaving the Tories to settle for the remaining two seats. It was a personal vote for Cllr. Bond, whose burgeoning Captain Birdseye-style beard hid a broad grin. Third place in the ward went to the Tories' rising star Lurline Champagnie, who became Harrow's first black councillor.....

The only drama was the nail-biting series of re-counts for third place in the traditional Labour ward of Wealdstone and the mercurial ward of Roxbourne. A handful of votes made all the difference from being a winner or an also-ran. The Liberals were on the verge of snatching third place in Wealdstone from Labour, while in Roxbourne it was the other way round. The remorseless check and check-again procedure went on until early Friday evening for Roxbourne and Monday evening for Wealdstone, making the results virtually the last to be announced in the country.

Power Dream Of Alliance Fades Away

Liberal group leader Dick Hains hoped he would be a changed man after the count — from opposition group leader to Council leader. The Alliance regarded Harrow as highly winnable, but as the night wore on, the pre-election boasts of the Alliance making significant inroads into the Tory heartland emerged as simply boasts. Restrained excitement turned to philosophical resignation, particularly for the SDP which — as in 1982 — failed to capture a single seat.

Nevertheless, the Alliance's Liberal-only power base on the Council grows steadily stronger. It is only eight years since Stephen Giles-Medhurst became the Liberals' lone voice on a Con-Lab dominated authority. Now their group numbers 18. They increased, in some cases quite substantially, their majorities in Greenhill, Headstone South and Harrow Weald. But in Marlborough — where the proposed school closure dominated canvassing — Labour came close and cut the majority from 516 to 65. Labour also squeezed the Alliance vote in many other wards.

Rayners Lane was a cautiously expected bonus, and Ridgeway a disappointment. Dick Hains said: "I'm absolutely delighted with an increased group. The Council will be much more interesting now. It will be tested for the first time. The days of the masterful Tory rule are over."

For Labour it was a night of mixed blessings. In Kenton East it increased its majority, but seemingly never-ending re-counts in supposedly safe Wealdstone finally showed one of the three seats lost — by three votes. It reclaimed from the Tories the narrowly-held Stanmore South, the Tories' shock result of 1982. However, in only three wards was the Alliance pushed into third place.

Deputy group leader, Keith Toms, said he was happy the Labour vote had increased borough-wide, and that it had been unaffected by an Alliance "smear campaign" which, he said, went as far as suggesting he was a member of the Militant Tendency. "The result is something to build on, a springboard for when people become disillusioned with the candy floss policies of the Alliance. We fought the election on sound policies and have been rewarded," he said.

Perhaps the most intriguing result of the night was the return once again of Roxeth's three Ratepayer councillors. The non-partisan ward is an established political anomaly at odds with the rest of the borough — and is obviously keen to remain so.

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Thursday 10 May 1990

TORIES RETAIN THEIR POWER

The Conservatives have comfortably retained power in Harrow — despite widespread pre-poll speculation that the Council would become hung or even Labour controlled. From the outset the Tories never really looked in any danger and managed to boost their majority from one to nine, capturing seats from the Liberal Democrats. The final result was Conservatives 36 seats, Labour 13, Liberal Democrats 11 and Independent Residents 3.

Last Thursday's poll attracted an unusually high turnout with 51% of the electorate voting. A neck-and-neck race in Roxbourne provided the only election cliff-hanger. Candidates had to wait until the next day and endure three counts before it was settled.

But the war had been won a long time before that battle. Broad smiles on the faces of all but a few Tories indicated from a very early stage that things were going their way. They held their strongholds of Hatch End, Pinner West, Canons, Stanmore Park, Headstone North and Wemborough. And they held convincingly on to Harrow on the Hill but were hard pushed by the Liberal Democrats in Ridgeway.

Sipping champagne after it was clear the Tories had gained a clear majority, a jubilant Council leader Ron Grant, said: "I am absolutely delighted. In the end we were confident that people would recognise a well run Council and come out and vote for us." And of the next four years? "Good services at the lowest prices. Just more of the same really — which is what people want," he said.

One of the biggest cheers of the night went up when Labour swept the board in Marlborough, capturing all three seats from the Liberal Democrats in a closely-fought contest. The new Labour trio is Pravin Shah, Ann Groves and Phillip O'Dell. Another minor upset saw Independent James Bond, a councillor since 1984, lose his seat in true-blue Pinner. But he was philosophical afterwards, praising the trio of Independents who held on to Roxeth

Labour Leader Ready To Fight

Labour has elected a new leader, Keith Toms, who has resolved to fight even harder against Harrow's election winning Tories..... "Now that we are the official opposition we will pursue a policy of ensuring children, teachers and the homeless get a fair deal," said Cllr. Toms, whose predecessor, Keith Burchell, was banned from standing in the elections by Government legislation because he works for another council.

Cllr. Toms added: "There is a growing body of hidden poverty in Harrow, and the present level of poll tax will only make this worse." He said he would have liked Labour to have won more seats. "But we have improved our vote in strong Tory areas like Kenton West and Centenary and hope to take them next time," he said. "But the people of Harrow have been bribed with their own money."

"We Are Down But Not Out"

Liberal Democrat leader Howard Cooper was delighted to have held on to most of his party's seats against the trend of national opinion polls. "We are down but definitely not out," he said. "The other two parties had claimed we were going to be wiped out in the election and even defeated in my ward, but that has not happened."

Cllr. Cooper was also pleased about results where some Liberal Democrats did not win. "Labour was very confident of thrashing us in Marlborough, for example," he said. "But we nearly held on to it and that will stand us in good stead for any by-elections which come up." He was also pleased about the quality of councillors under his leadership. "They will make a significant contribution to the life of the Council," he said. "They are also very young which bodes well for the future. I count as an old man in the group and I am not yet 50."

Nail-biting Delay At The Re-counts In Roxbourne Ward

Just 32 votes were enough to make Labour the opposition party in Harrow, after two re-counts in Roxbourne ward. Labour's Glyn Davies was declared the last of the three councillors for the ward, joining two Liberal Democrats, Susan Boobis and John Skipworth. The result ensured that the Labour group held onto 13 seats with the Liberals on 11. Cllr. Davies beat the third Liberal, Rob Prowse into defeat by just 32 votes. If Mr. Prowse had taken the seat, Labour and Liberal Democrats would have had level pegging on the Council with 12 councillors each.

For some time in the early hours of Friday morning, it had looked like Labour's one winner would have been Alex Bruce. But the Harrow returning officer, Keith Gowling, eventually ruled his vote had been miscalculated by 100. "It was a nice hour," said Mr. Bruce afterwards. Counting had taken from 9 pm on Thursday night and was abandoned without a decision at 3 am. The counters met again at 2 pm on Friday and the result was declared at about 4.30 pm.

“HISTORIC VICTORY”

Swept To Brink Of Power, Liberal Democrats Pledge A New Kind Of Council

Triumphant Liberal Democrat councillors have ousted the Tory administration from Harrow Council after 20 years of rule. On Thursday of last week, Harrow's voters delivered a resounding thumbs down to the Conservatives, who had held power since 1974, giving the Lib Dems 29 seats, the Tories 17 and Labour 14. South Harrow's three independent councillors were re-elected, giving them the balance of power. Their votes alone are enough to give the Lib Dems overall control.

Delighted Lib Dem leader Cllr. Chris Noyce announced: “This is a historic victory for our party. The people of Harrow have seen what the Tories have had to offer and they don't want it. It is time for a new kind of council.”

The immediate effects of the election could be far-reaching. Cllr. Noyce said he would be holding urgent talks with the council's legal officers to ascertain if it were possible to reverse the decision made just three weeks ago to transfer Harrow's 7,350 council homes over to two housing associations. The non-profit making associations, Jephson Homes and Chiltern Hundreds, have already indicated they would be unwilling to go ahead with the , 2m-a-year deal if they had to work with an unco-operative council.

Other measures high on the Lib Dems' post-election agenda are the reversal of Tory decisions to introduce charges for pest control and the closure of public toilets in parks. “These were petty cuts and we will act on them immediately,” said Cllr. Noyce. “We have to work within the Tory Government's budgetary restraints but these kinds of decisions hurt everyone and save little.”

Although the Lib Dems do not have an overall majority, the independent councillors have said they will back their decisions on committee chairmen and vice-chairmen, which need a majority vote. This avoids the Lib Dems having to concede the important casting vote positions to either of the two minority parties.

Tory leader Donald Abbott blamed the Government for his group's poor performance - among the worst for his party in the country. “Voters stayed away in protest against the Government,” said Cllr. Abbott. “We had to fight on two fronts — against our own Government and the other parties.” Shock losses for his party included the Pinner West, Headstone North and Centenary wards.

Disappointed Labour leader Keith Toms had talked of possibly taking control of the council, but his group made only one net gain. It snatched Centenary ward from the Tories but lost two seats in Marlborough to the Lib Dems. “It would have been nice to have won more seats but the new Labour councillors will be a great benefit,” said Cllr. Toms. “In the 20 years I have been a councillor we have never been in the current position of being able to really influence things.”

“A Very Disappointing Day”

Candidates watched nervously as ballot boxes containing the council election votes were emptied at the Harrow Leisure Centre last Thursday evening. As an army of counters sorted the ballot papers into four trays - each representing a different political party — candidates were given a first indication of results. Labour deputy leader Tony McNulty stared intently at the red basket representing his votes in Stanmore South. “Nervewracking,” he stammered. “It is the most terrifying experience — there is nothing to do but watch the votes.”

On the other side of the hall Mayor Bobbie Feakins looked on dispassionately. For the first council election in 30 years he was not a candidate — and he had no regrets. “There is too much party politics now and not enough concern for people,” he mourned. “After all, it is not the party that elects you but the people.”

Young candidates fighting for their first seat had no such reservations. As the council's chief legal officer, Roger Vergine, announced the results for Centenary ward, 29-year-old Labour candidate Paul Fox let out a huge roar of delight. He and his two colleagues had snatched power from the Tories. “It is the most wonderful feeling. We have fought so hard but now it is worth it,” he said. “I can't wait for the first meeting so we can start work.”

Reactions of most candidates depended on their own result but for the party leaders every result was significant. “The Liberal Democrats are doing very well across the borough,” admitted Cllr. McNulty,

despite winning his own seat with a huge majority.

At 2.30 am few candidates or supporters were left to hear that results for Pinner West and Kenton West were so close they would be delayed until the following day. Tory leader Donald Abbott was one of the last people to leave the hall. He had held onto his own seat but his party had been routed. "Obviously a very disappointing day," he shrugged.

Extract from *The Times*, Saturday 9 May 1998

BLAIR HAILS SIGNIFICANT VICTORY IN LEAFY HARROW

The suburb of Harrow was last night coming to terms with its new masters after Labour secured control of the borough for the first time. By the narrowest of margins and after several nail-biting recounts, the local authority was seized by the party in an historic victory. Although Labour was the largest group in the early 1970s, the Tories have traditionally held the North London council until they lost overall control in 1994. The result comes after Labour won both the Parliamentary seats from the Tories at the General Election.

The victory was secured only after three counts in the Harrow on the Hill ward, which was finally won by the Labour candidate, Huw Stanley Davies, by just five votes. Labour now has 32 seats — up from 16 — to the Tories' 20, up three from 17. The Liberal Democrats were the big losers, seeing their seats drop from 27 to just 9.....

The Prime Minister welcomed the Harrow result as "a very significant victory". Mr. Blair said: "It shows how much people welcome New Labour when they see it in action at a national and local level. Harrow is now New Labour territory. The lesson is clear: when New Labour is genuinely on offer, people vote for it."

Extracts from the *Harrow Observer*, Thursday 14 May 1998

Asda Re-think Is A Priority As Labour Flexes Its Political Muscle In Harrow

WE'RE IN CHARGE

Labour has hit the ground running with a series of image-breaking measures to transform Harrow after its historic win in last week's Council elections. Triumphant leader Bob Shannon has set out his stall by insisting the Council implement his party's manifesto pledges — and by demanding changes to Asda's plans for a superstore in Wealdstone.....

Labour took control in Harrow for the first time after a nail-biting finish that required two re-counts to decide the winner. The party gained 32 seats, one more than the combined strength of the other parties.... The Lib Dems lost 18 seats. Among their casualties was John Branch, who would have been the new Mayor. They are furious that Labour has decided to put forward a candidate for Mayor.....

Five Votes That Clinched It

In the end, it all came down to five votes as a Friday morning cliffhanger decided who would run Harrow. Conservative agents had insisted on a second re-count in Harrow on the Hill ward, after the first two counts gave Labour narrow wins in the third seat. The first count resulted in a 1,022 total for Labour, with Tory Mark Versallion on 1,017.

When the first re-count gave Labour victory by just four votes, the Tories were still not satisfied. Mr. Versallion said: "It must have been frustrating, but we wanted to make sure. After all, what was at stake was who would run the Council." So it was on to the committee rooms of Harrow Civic Centre at 11 am the morning after polling. More than 40 activists turned up, many of them Labour supporters who had celebrated through the night.

After 12 tellers had counted for 70 minutes, returning officer Gerald Balabanoff announced the result to huge cheers — the first count had been right. A party began immediately in the nearby Labour office. "I am

delighted the people of Harrow have put their trust in Labour," said leader Cllr. Bob Shannon. "I hope they will not be disappointed."

Defeated Lib Dem Claims: Greens Cost Me My Seat

Deputy Liberal Democrat leader Stephen Giles-Medhurst left the count even before his result was officially announced. He has sat on the Council for 20 years, part of that time as the lone Liberal voice intervening in the Punch and Judy show starring Labour and Tory councillors.

He was the biggest-name casualty on a night which devastated his party. Other losers were former social services chairman John Skipworth, ex-education chairman Maureen de Beer and former Deputy Mayor John Branch. "I am pretty gutted," said Mr. Giles-Medhurst. "If all the Green Party votes had gone to me, I would still be a councillor. But in the end, we were just not able to match the Labour machine, with its telephone canvassing and so on....."

Lib Dem colleague John Branch lost his seat in Headstone South after eight years as a councillor. The defeat also means he cannot become Mayor. "I'm disappointed but I've been in politics for 50 years and I know there's never a safe Liberal Democrat seat. We have to earn every one." Mr. Branch, a 62-year-old retired high school head of technology, will concentrate on his other passion, dog breeding and judging.

Other casualties included respected Tory Joseph Grenfell. There was happier news for veteran councillor Anthony Cocksedge, who had a comfortable victory in Pinner. He was on the Council three years before the birth of 22-year-old civil servant Damian Krushner, who became the youngest member of the Council with his Labour victory in Greenhill.

Extracts from the *Harrow Times*, Thursday 14 May 1998

Victory As Hill Seat Falls After 12 Hour Cliffhanger

LABOUR TAKES HARROW

One Seat Overall Majority — Lib Dems Reduced To Rump

Labour has performed the full monty in Harrow. It now has control of the Council, as well as the borough's two MPs and the local Euro-MP. In a nailbiting finish to last weeks' elections, the party had to wait until noon on Friday for its overall majority. Ironically, it was Harrow on the Hill that returned the final councillor to give Labour power in the borough for the first time in 24 years. The party took one of the Conservatives' three Hill seats — by just five votes and after two re-counts. New Council leader, Bob Shannon, said: "We could not have scripted it to have more tension."

Both the borough's Labour MPs were jubilant, seeing the election of twice as many Labour councillors as in the last election as an endorsement of the Government. Tony McNulty (Harrow East) said: "The people of Harrow are happy with New Labour in Government and they will be happy with it in Harrow. It augurs very well for a bright future. I am delighted." Gareth Thomas (West) said: "I am absolutely delighted at the result and it shows the scale of change we saw in the General Election was not a one-off. Tony Blair's New Labour Government is as popular as ever."

The Conservatives blamed the situation nationally for their defeat. Deputy Conservative leader John Cowan said: "I suspect that if it was not for the Blair factor Labour would not have done as well and we would have regained control."

But while it was bad news for the Tories, it was even worse for the Liberal Democrats, previously the biggest party in the Council chamber. They saw their ranks slashed from 27 councillors to just 9. Their leader, Cllr. Chris Noyce, said: "We had four years of being the biggest party on the Council, but without overall control. However, we were perceived as being in control and so carried the can for rises in Council Tax and cuts in Council services."

As he cracked open a bottle of bubbly, Cllr. Shannon gave his first pledge: "Champagne for everyone!"

Cheers And Tears As Harrow Goes Red

There were stunned faces and tears as the Labour Party swept back into power in Harrow after more than two decades in opposition. The big losers were the Liberal Democrats, who formerly held most seats on the Council but had no overall majority. Their seats are now in single figures and many blame their road hump policies and cuts in school budgets for their downfall, as Labour snatched seats from them across the borough.

The smell of alcohol filled the air as candidates and their supporters arrived from the pubs at the count at Harrow Leisure Centre in Wealdstone, but what may have been originally intended to calm nerves later drowned sorrows. No one expected Labour to do so well. They were predicted to make significant gains but not to double their number of seats. The victory was a mixture of satisfaction with Tony Blair and unpopular local Liberal Democrat policies over the last four years, said Labour leader Cllr. Bob Shannon.

"We were cautiously optimistic," he said. "The Lib Dems' decision to cut schools' delegated budgets by 8%, which we then got down to two, was a major factor in their defeat. We pledge never to cut them, ever. The people of Harrow want a fresh start."

There was glee among Labour supporters as each result was read out at astonishing speed by the returning officer, whoops of joy as the party ousted sitting councillors and cheers of satisfaction when Labour councillors held their seats. Harrow East MP Tony McNulty and West's Gareth Thomas joined their former Council colleagues to offer support and share in the victory.

As the count closed, it was still unknown if any party had an overall majority and everyone was on tenterhooks until the next day as a re-count in Harrow on the Hill was needed to determine whether Labour would take control. Just a handful of votes were disputed with Labour looking to take a seat in the traditional Tory stronghold. One re-count was held in the early hours of Friday, but on the insistence of the Tories a further check was arranged for 11 am the next day at the Civic Centre.

Familiar faces will be missing from the Council chamber..... Marlborough ward Liberal Democrat Brian Campbell seemed to know early on that he may not be re-elected..... Headstone South Liberal Democrat Stephen Giles-Medhurst, one of the longest serving members, also lost his seat.

Former Harrow West MP Robert Hughes was rallying his Conservative troops. Two sitting Tory councillors [Cllr. Grenfell and Cllr. Crossman] lost their seats to Labour, but the Conservatives took seats from the Lib Dems and held their strongholds of Pinner, Canons, Hatch End and Stanmore Park. Conservative leader Christine Bednell said: "We didn't gain as many seats as we hoped."

There was great disappointment in the Lib Dem ranks. Their leader, Cllr. Chris Noyce, said: "The result is not a fair reflection on the last four years in Harrow. This is the result of 18 years of Tory rule and one year of a Labour Government." For one Lib Dem councillor the loss of his seat was a double blow. Deputy Mayor John Branch was due to become Mayor next week, but Labour ousted each of the Liberal Democrats in his Headstone South ward and a new Mayor will now need to be selected.

For Wealdstone ward councillor Cyril Harrison, who retained his seat comfortably, the victory was long overdue. He led the party when it last ruled the Council from 1971 to 1974. "We were responsible for building this Leisure Centre and masterminded the reorganisation of the education system which at the time the *Times Educational Supplement* described as 'Harrow's perfect plan', and it has stood the test of time," he said.

"The Lib Dems deserved to go down: they were rudderless and leadershipless. What we need to generate is a 'can do' culture," he added before his group headed off to the Labour Centre in Byron Road, Wealdstone, to celebrate.