

PREFACE

This is the latest in a series of books to be issued which, when taken together, are intended to be a definitive source of election statistics for Harrow. Previous volumes — sadly out of print — have recorded the election results for Harrow Urban District Council (1934-1953), the Municipal Borough of Harrow (1954-1963) and the London Borough of Harrow (1964-1977). Another volume has studied Parliamentary and County Council election results. It is hoped that the books are proving to be of use to local politicians, party workers, historians, journalists and psephologists.

This booklet retains many of the features of previous volumes, as well as resurrecting, from an earlier volume, an Appendix on the Roxbourne case of 1978. A new Appendix now records for the first time all General Election, GLC Election, and European Parliament Election results for the period covered, i.e. from May 1978 to 2001. It is hoped that the inclusion of this additional information will significantly enhance the value of the book to the general reader.

The 1990s witnessed a period of astonishing electoral turmoil in Harrow. In 1990, despite the “poll tax”, the Conservative Party won a comfortable majority on Harrow Council, gaining 36 seats, while the combined opposition could only muster 27. The downturn in Conservative fortunes began after the 1992 General Election, no doubt a reflection of the splits and sleaze associated with John Major’s government.

Through a mixture of good Council by-election results and favourable local press and television coverage, Harrow’s Liberal Democrats took advantage of the Conservative malaise and won a total of 29 seats at the May 1994 Council Election. This was sufficient for them to form a minority administration for the next four years. Nearby, in other outer London Boroughs, the Labour Party made significant advances in places such as Hillingdon, Ealing, Barnet and Enfield. In these circumstances it must have been an enormous disappointment for Harrow’s Labour Group to only increase their representation by one.

Within a few days of the May 1994 election Labour Party leader John Smith was dead. The appeal of Labour’s likely new leader, Tony Blair, to suburban Harrow was almost immediate. Ballot boxes from Harrow at the June 1994 count for the European Parliament Election indicated a significantly higher level of support for Labour than had been seen a month before. Later, all seven Harrow Council by-elections between 1995 and 1997 recorded swings to Labour, usually accompanied by a reduction in the Liberal Democrat vote. In addition, of course, the 1997 General Election resulted in Labour triumphs in both Harrow East and Harrow West constituencies. The Liberal Democrat tactic, especially in Harrow West, of trying to increase their support by circulating leaflets claiming that “everyone knows Labour cannot win round here” appeared to backfire badly.

Harrow’s “new” electoral behaviour was cemented by the 1998 Council Election, when the trend to Labour was confirmed as they won 32 seats, and became the majority party on Harrow Council for the first time. (The Labour Council between 1971 and 1974 was a minority administration.) Even Labour’s most optimistic members cannot have imagined such an outcome which depended, in the end, on securing a seat in the “blue chip” Tory ward of Harrow on the Hill.

This book was compiled as the events happened, so it is hoped that there are no factual errors. However, if any are spotted, I would welcome comments from readers so that corrections can be made in any subsequent volumes.

COLIN J. GRAY

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