



Are You Musical?

Part Two – The Mirror

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Chapter 1 - The Discovery of a Cartoon



I first saw this cartoon on 2 May 2019 just after Chewbacca died. Chewbacca – the life companion of Han Solo in *Star Wars*. A non-binary relationship, indeed, an evidently interspecies one. We're relaxed now about the varieties of love, but we weren't relaxed in the lifetimes of the two men here. The standing one in the battered hat wielding a very-tightly-furled umbrella is Henry Labouchere MP (1831-1912).

The prostrate one, putting up an arm to guard his head, is George Goschen MP (1831-1907). Who they? Well, George Goschen refused to rule India (it would have been on behalf of Queen Victoria) when he was asked to by a British politician in 1880. But this book is about the other man, the umbrella-wielder, Labouchere.

He developed a new legal term, 'gross indecency', for the affections of trans women and bi and gay men. That was during a Conservative government in 1885. In 1921, during a Liberal government nine years after his death, the British House of Commons felt that his law should be extended to lesbians as well. Only two successive interventions by the House of Lords stopped it happening.

Here's what he suggested to his fellow MPs on Thursday evening 6 August 1885:

'Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof, shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.'

The 'Labouchere Amendment', it came to be nicknamed. It lasted eighty-two years at full strength until moderated in 1967 in

England and Wales, and subsequently in Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, and N Ireland. It lasted for a hundred and thirty-one years, roughly six generations, if you count to the abolition of the last scrap of it in Britain in April 2017.

Variants of the Amendment were exported to countries occupied by the traders and military of the British Empire where earlier, originally English and Welsh, laws against same sex liaisons had often already been imposed. They are still being dismantled by black and BAME activists and the straight people and courts that agree with them. Many black and BAME activists must retreat to the British Isles and Ireland, such is the violence they experience at home.

That Labouchere should have been sent for counselling in summer 1885, and his Amendment quietly withdrawn by concerned friends, is obvious today. He proposed to send bi and gay men and trans women to jail in previously unheard-of numbers. Such a law was going to be bad for most men, not only for gay ones. And for women it was going to be disastrous.

Women were mothers and sisters and aunts and daughters of the gay men and bi men and trans women. Some were wives of them. Had Donizetti lived long enough (he died in 1848 when Labouchere was seventeen) he might have written a companion piece to *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Naples, 1835) and called it *Lettice di Madresfield*.

It would have told with all the power of opera the true story of how a Worcestershire woman went mad in 1931 when her brother threatened to prosecute her 'bi' husband, the father of her seven children, under the Labouchere Amendment. She lost the affections of six of her children and her home and was shamed, in the sense that all such things are experienced as shame, in front of all her acquaintance.

Men too were mothers, in their way. That's to say they were fathers. And brothers. And nephews. And brothers-in-law. And uncles and cousins, of gay and bi and trans boys. They too were going to suffer if one of the males in the family appeared in the

local paper charged with same-sex love. There was perhaps a further hurt done to most males by the Labouchere Amendment.

It encouraged a kind of inhibition that white men already leaned towards, as a dominant caste heading an empire. Those of us who grew up in the 1940s remember how white boys expected no physical touch from their father after infancy beyond a handshake. A man might pass a long life never embracing his son at any age. Grown men were not to embrace their best mates.

A heart-felt handshake, a brief intent gaze, that was it at most. “Kiss me, Hardy!” was an earlier age. Save in contact-sports. The organised games for which the British Empire became famous received their rules and clubhouses and playing fields during just the years leading up to the Labouchere Amendment. In the moment of release of a sporting victory, men might touch their foreheads together, wrap arms around each other, put arms round waists.

It’s weird for 80-year-old white folks of London or Leeds today to watch evidently straight cold-sober white men hug each other in front of their womenfolk, just as the womenfolk have always embraced each other in front of the men. And more extraordinary still, to watch men push strollers or wear babies. A man attempting to do either of those things in London in the 1940s when I and my brothers were kids would have been shouted at by other men, and most women would have been shocked, or pretended to be.

So powerful did the binary commands of the 20th century prove, as they were urged on by Labouchere in his Amendment and by those who felt like him, that a kindly-minded, strongly-built, man like my father wouldn’t help carry a woman’s shopping bags in a street, dearly as he loved each of the principal women in his long life. He’d only help carry the bags from the boot of a car indoors or up a flight of stairs. To do otherwise was to be henpecked, or worse, to be queer.

I set out in 2016 to write a short pamphlet summarising the story of Henry Labouchere and his doings. I was going to call it something like *Who Was That Man?* – gratefully and gleefully

ripping off the title of Neil Bartlett's 1988 book "*Who Was That Man? A Present for Oscar Wilde*" For Wilde was prosecuted in 1895 under Labouchere's law. As in 1952 was Alan Turing, soon to be on our £50 notes. If any of us are lucky enough to see one.

Chapter 2 - Tom Merry

My idea was to produce the Labouchere pamphlet as a souvenir for sixty or so who gathered at a "Great Gay 50th Anniversary Lunch" at the National Liberal Club in London in July 2017. Old and young, straight and LGBT, we were honouring the memory of Antony Grey (b.1927, d.2010) who for many years led the LGBT side of a 1950s to 1960s campaign in Britain to abolish the Labouchere Amendment.

Cheshire-born and Yorkshire by upbringing, Antony and his straight and gay colleagues in the cause achieved a break-through with the Sexual Offences Act 1967. Eric Thompson, of Beverley in Yorkshire, Antony's partner of fifty years, was with us, arriving from the home they had shared in the London borough of Brent, one of the most diverse boroughs in England with Asian and Indian, Black African, Black Caribbean, Irish (largest in the country), and Eastern European communities.

John Labouchere, a collateral descendant of Henry Labouchere and the author in 1992 of *High Horses: An Andean Adventure*, was with us at the lunch in a friendly spirit, though not as a supporter of the cause. He travelled to us from his home in Norfolk. His Dutch cousin Joan Labouchere ('Joan': Dutch for John) was unable to come but corrected my wrong first account of the origins of the Labouchere family in south-western France.

Also, with us at lunch was Dick Taverne, one of the leaders of many straight supporters of abolition of the Labouchere Amendment in Parliament in 1967. Born in 1928, first joining the Labour Party, nowadays a Liberal Democrat, he defied insulting remarks by some other self-declared straight MPs in the

Parliament of 1967 and helped get the necessary clauses through the Commons.

But I missed the lunch deadline for the pamphlet. I couldn't make up my mind about the *reasons* for Henry Labouchere's behaviour in 1885. Why did one of the richest men in England, fifty-two years old, living with a married woman with whom he had one daughter, Dora, ask the House of Commons to pass that law? My problem wasn't that I could find no reason: I could find too many.

And why was there almost total silence in the House of Commons when he made his proposal, and *absolute* silence in the House of Lords? The silence everywhere resembled *omerta*, the old silence of the Sicilians in the face of demands by the Mafia. The answer to the quietness, I find, was largely a wicked old party called William Blackstone (1723-1780), born in Cheapside, London. We'll come to William in due course.

Let's return, though, to the cartoon I first saw in the gents of the Reform Club Pall Mall in May 2019 which shows fifty-two-year-old Henry Labouchere in a battered hat raising a fierce umbrella against a fallen fellow Liberal MP, fifty-two-year-old George Goschen. The two figures are in fact a detail, though a foreground and prominent one, of a very large drawing.

In the large drawing three hundred and fifty-two Liberal MPs are *all* attacking one-another, most of them of course mere touches on the drawing's horizon. I photographed the picture on the spot in the Reform lavatory on 2 May 2019, emailed it to myself, printed it when I got home, and cut out the Labouchere and Goschen figures so that they could stand alone. Or in Goschen's case, lie alone.

And that beautiful drawing of the two figures is what the designer of this site, Alan Martin, has printed here as an insert to the first paragraph of Chapter 1 and again here at the start of Chapter 2. The complete picture is signed 'Tom Merry', which I find is the pseudonym of William Meham (1853-1902), born near

Southwark Bridge in London where the City's greatest public lavatory used to be, of which - also - more later.

I *had* thought, in the spring of 2019, that after nearly four years' laptop dancing around Henry Labouchere (for my pamphlet) I knew all the cartoons and caricatures of the man. I'd even seen a privately-owned small bronze bust of him in his old age that belongs to John Labouchere, our guest at the National Liberal Club lunch in 2017. With his wife Mary he let me photograph it at their home in November 2016.

It shows Henry Labouchere's distinctive ski-jump nose (not apparent in John). What I didn't know was that there is a whole cache of drawings by 'Merry' that include Labouchere caricatures. I have my brother David to thank for the delight of the discovery. I wouldn't have been at the Reform at all that May if he hadn't insisted over my own dead body on going to a school reunion there.

It was due to be held in the long Library of the Club. So, on 2 May 2019 there we went, we three, my younger brother David and my middle brother Quentin. We joined sixty or so other men who'd been at our boys-only school in the late 1950s-early 1960s. There's nothing about the 1950s I wish to go back to. Also, I was frightened of re-meeting a Scot I'd been in love with.

I never told him. My secret love. Nothing 'happened'. Dante and Beatrice. I was afraid, nonetheless, to see him, for the beautiful may be handsome in their seventies, but can't be the children we were at sixteen/seventeen. So much for fear: he wasn't there. I didn't ask anyone whether to their knowledge M is alive or dead. Beatrice died at twenty-five and Dante lived on and on.

I went to the loo instead and saw Henry Labouchere. Other men arrived for the facilities, and left the facilities, while I stood there and stood there with my iPhone out. Labouchere and Goschen may have glanced at the very same drawing in the very same frame in the very same building in Pall Mall in January 1886.

The building was the Liberal Party's principal political 'safe space' in their day. Improbable as it may seem, there could

occasionally be infighting between members of the same political party, and as a result between members of the same Club. So, it fell out in the 1880s. The Liberal Party split over the issue of Home Rule for Ireland, like an iceberg calving.

MPs representing the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish electorates, all of whom in the 1880s met at Westminster, did political battle. Should the former Irish Parliament in Dublin, the *Oireachtas Éireann*, which had been transferred to Westminster by a vote of the Anglo-Irish landowners in 1800, be revived to manage Irish affairs? Queen Victoria, who never went to Ireland, was to remain Head of State.

Labouchere and Goschen's political leader William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) decided in late 1885 that the *Oireachtas Éireann* should be revived. 'Merry' gleefully made cartoon after cartoon about the consequences.

Chapter 3 - Labouchere Comforts a Man in a Frock

I open a copy of the London *Times* on 15 October 2019 to find out what the print edition is saying about a British Prime Minister's efforts to deprive the nation's children of freedom of movement in continental Europe, and what do I find? That the better-off in Britain were happier at the time of the Labouchere Amendment than they have ever been since:

“According to a study that tracked the national mood over the past two centuries’ writes the newspaper’s science correspondent Rhys Blakely, ‘people were most content in the Victorian era. Researchers analysed the emotional tone of the language used in millions of books and newspaper articles and found that the 1880s, during which Queen Victoria celebrated her golden jubilee and the British Empire was approaching its peak, was the country’s happiest decade.’

Considering Alan Turing's personal sufferings between 1952-1954 under the Labouchere Amendment of 1885 it's pleasant to

see that the Alan Turing Institute in London, founded in 2015, contributed to the team that compared the happiness over two centuries of people in Britain, Germany, Italy and the United States. By definition this was the happiness of the professional and middle classes.

The researchers found that Germans and Italians when they prosper tend to be happier, whatever the decade, than the British and Irish. Contributing to that peak of middle-class happiness in Britain in the 1880s, compared (allegedly) to today, or any other day, must have been the series of double-page political cartoons by Tom Merry in the *St Stephen's Review* between 1883-1892.

Provided you could afford to buy the *Review* or had time to go to a public library and see a copy, you didn't even have to be able to read well. Like stained glass the cartoon told the entire story, with scarcely need for more than a label. Nor, to enjoy the cartoons, did you have to be on one side or the other of the political argument about whether to restore the *Oireachtas Éireann*, the former Irish Parliament, to a building in Dublin.

The *St Stephen's Review* was Conservative, and therefore hostile to Home Rule by the Irish. No matter. You could be a supporter of Home Rule and *still* delight in Merry's cartoons laughing at the setbacks experienced during their Home Rule campaign by the leadership of the W E Gladstone wing of the Liberal Party, including Henry Labouchere. Whether the cartoonist was himself a Conservative, or just took the money for his best work wherever he could find it, I don't know.

St Stephen's, it should perhaps be added, was a well-known 19th century short term for the House of Commons. It referred to the former St Stephen's Chapel in the old royal palace of Westminster where the Commons used to sit until the destruction of the building by fire in 1834. 'Presentation Cartoons', Merry used to call his *St Stephen's* drawings, each a deliberate masterpiece in its technique.

He surely knew that no less a figure than Michelangelo used to make Presentation Drawings in chalk or ink or charcoal for his

friend Cavaliere. People bought the Merry prints and ‘presented’ them - to themselves or to institutions. Lord Randolph Churchill (1849-1895), occasional Conservative Cabinet Minister and father of Winston Churchill, figured in them and his son collected them. Today sets are in national and University collections in Northern Ireland, the United States and London.

I gather the House of Commons has a complete set, and no doubt among them has the one called *Conference of the Liberal Party* that I saw one May day framed in the loo at the Reform Club, London, causing me to linger in astonishment, iPhone out, glanced at by exiting and entering men. That’s the cartoon of which I’ve used a detail here in front of chapters 1 & 2: Liberal MP Henry Labouchere in a battered hat standing over fallen and vanquished fellow Liberal MP George Goschen with a threatening furled umbrella.

‘*Parcere subjectis*’, reads the inscription carved on the granite outer gateway of Dartmoor Prison in England’s West Country, built to house French prisoners-of-war some twenty-five years before Henry Labouchere was born. ‘Spare the vanquished’, it means. We are to understand, if only in fun, that Labouchere did *not* spare the vanquished.

Since seeing the Reform Club cartoon in 2019 I’ve found on the web, among other Tom Merry cartoons that include caricatures of Henry Labouchere MP, one dated 12 June 1886 called *‘Waking’ the Home Rule Bill*. Merry imagines in the *St Stephen’s Review* that W E Gladstone and his principal supporters are mourning the ‘death’ of Irish Home Rule. They crowd in distress around an open coffin containing not a person but a copy of their Home Rule Bill. It’s a premature scene of mourning. Not that Merry was to know that in January 1886.

The project for the return of the *Oireachtas Éireann*, the Irish Parliament, to Dublin, didn’t in the event die. Like the abolition of the British slave trade, conceded by a British Parliament in 1807 after 279 years of black pride revolts in the Bahamas, Caribbean, Cuba, Haiti, South Carolina, New York, Georgia, and Virginia,

involving sixteen uprisings, three of them successful, return of the Irish Parliament to Dublin was finally conceded by the UK Parliament in 1922 after 124 years of Irish rebellions.

In the June 1886 Merry drawing Gladstone droops at the foot of the coffin, his hand on his forehead. A despairing Home Ruler raises his arms heavenwards and wears what appears to be a bowler hat, later the hard hat associated with the 'anti-Home Rule' Democratic Unionist Party of N Ireland founded by Protestant Evangelical Christian Rev. Ian Paisley in 1971 which ever since has preached without charity antagonism to Roman Catholicism, ecumenism, and homosexuality.

The surface of the bowler is fortified, (somewhat unbelievably, but apparently, it's true) by a secretion of a female bug found on trees in India and Thailand, imported by European traders, and first applied to hard-hat making by an Englishman in 1849. So, the mourner's hat hints at the violence always to be anticipated in Ireland (according to cartoonists), as does the hard drink in every hand and lying about in an un-stoppered jug and an overturned tankard.

Several of the Liberal MPs in *Waking' the Home Rule Bill* are in drag with large bosoms, legs man-spread under long skirts, male faces lifted in misery. Labouchere, interestingly, is *not* one of the colleagues in drag. He's drawn without umbrella as a rustic old man in the clothing of another century. He tries to console a fellow Liberal MP in drag who with sullen down-turned mouth extends a hand to snuff out the only illumination in the bare cottage, three candles stuck in beer bottles at the head of the 'corpse'.

In another burly hand the drag firmly clenches a pint of stout. Presumably it's Guinness from St James's Gate. The Irish are 'bog Oirish' – drunk, superstitious, old-fashioned, poor because too lazy to work, and ready, if their fecklessness makes them too overwhelmingly hungry, to eat their own children. Re the drag: Tom Merry in his political caricatures had to do without representations of women, real women being barred from election to the British and Irish House of Commons until 1918.

Chapter 4 - The Devil's Dyke

Henry Labouchere is in other Tom Merry cartoons I've now seen, since the first I ever saw, the one on a wall in the gents of the Reform Club in London dated 23 January 1886, the one called *Conference of the Liberal Party*. The one in which three hundred and fifty-two Liberal MPs are not in conference but in pitched battle, hurling anything and everything at each other from furniture to fists.

The one, that is, in which Labouchere is made so prominent menacing fallen-down fellow-Liberal MP George Goschen with an umbrella – comedy equivalent of a sword or a cudgel. And we've just heard, in Chapter 3, of Labouchere's further comedy appearance in a battered hat and century-old men's clothing consoling a colleague in *'Waking' the Home Rule Bill* published in June 1886.

Then I find on-line that Labouchere was also in *The Home Rule Coach and its Destination*. This was a cartoon by Tom Merry that the *St Stephen's Review* published as a full-colour two-page spread on 12 March 1887, nine months after *Conference of the Liberal Party* and eighteen months and twelve days after the Labouchere Amendment tried to impose a solely binary arrangement on a varied world.

W E Gladstone, a married man displaying no interest in same sex issues but leading the efforts by some at Westminster to restore the Irish Parliament to Dublin, is imagined driving his supporters in a coach and horses across open countryside. 'Home Rule' (for Ireland) is written on the coach-door. The horses' faces, with down-turned mouths, are those of Liberal politicians.

Some of the MPs are got up as women, as in *'Waking' the Home Rule Bill*, proving the artistic desperation of political cartoonists at only being allowed men to draw until 1919. A broken fence lies ahead of the Home Rule coach. Beyond that is a cliff on which is written in large capital letters 'THE DEVIL'S

DYKE'. The what? I've lived in Sussex, and I went to schools there, but I never heard of that place until I looked it up today.

It's a chasm on the Sussex uplands, locally called 'the downs', a wide landscape with wild skies, turf cropped short by sheep, near to Brighton and Hove. I thought on first seeing the drawing that the cliff for which the coach is heading must surely fall to the Irish Sea, but no, the Home Rule coach is quite fantastically lost and is off-roading near the English Channel, travelling east instead of west.

'The Devil's Dyke', into which it's heading to rumble, must have been famous to Victorians or Tom Merry surely wouldn't have put the place-name on his drawing with no further explanation. The chief warden of the downs today, surely a wonderful job, looking for rare butterflies - says that the painter John Constable called the region of the Devil's Dyke "the best view in the world."

Well, in Constable's day, born in 1776, died in 1837 when Labouchere was five, and about to go to a Sussex boarding-school, it was an hour and a half or so's six-mile horse and carriage ride out of Brighton in the direction of Small Dole to get to the Devil's Dyke. Middle-class ladies would have been helped up a carriage-step, whether or not they wished for help, and placed in the carriages whether they wished to walk or not, and pressured to hold parasols up in gloved hands to guard their complexions against sun and wind, whether they wished it or not.

And the younger gentlemen would have ridden on horseback alongside, which looked handsome, even if they'd have preferred to be lazing in the carriages. The National Trust says such parties would have seen clear-sighted kestrels soaring overhead and that the once-vanishing hawks can again be seen today if you explore 'the deepest dry valley in the country, where the Devil and his wife are said to be buried.'

A nice conceit. If the Devil and his wife are buried there, God and his wife must surely be nearby. The drawing in 'The Home Rule Coach and its Destination' is like a still from a movie, freeze-

framed just as the coach is caught at a momentary halt before careering into the chasm. Henry Labouchere has got down from the coach, a tiny figure easily missed. He stoops close to the broken fence in the shrubbery, wearing what appears for once to be rather a smart Homberg hat, but he's recognisable by his jutting Van Dyck beard.

He's examining the offside coach-wheel, which appears to be jammed against a boulder. Labouchere is also, and a little more prominently, in a Merry cartoon for the St Stephen's Review which is dated 7 April 1888 and called Ireland For Ever. Pigs might fly mounted on pigs, also perhaps symbolic of the grand Irish bacon trade to Wales and England, Liberal Party supporters of Irish Home Rule are charging head-on towards the viewer beneath a ragged banner reading Home Rule.

The obvious reference for the first readers of the St Stephen's Review, who were all, in the 1880s, raised on the Church of England Bible or the Roman Catholic Bible or were Jewish and knew the New Testament in Hebrew (the 'Berit Hadashah') was to the 'Gadarene swine': pigs who drowned themselves after Jesus Christ forced an evil spirit into them in Gadara on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee.

Henry Labouchere is on the right flank of the charge of the swine, on a pig of his own, wearing the same battered hat that Merry gave him in 1886 in Conference of the Liberal Party. Unseen onlookers are hurling debris at them: a broken bottle, a cabbage, a cat, bricks, a bunch of carrots. One Home Ruler is being knocked off the back of his pig by a flying turnip. We'll come to turnips again, or rather to turnip-tops, in connection with the pillorying of bi and gay men in England.

The careering Home Rulers in Ireland For Ever wave shillelaghs, the awesome Irish cudgels of knotted oak or blackthorn easily capable, English people told each other, of knocking a man's brains out. The contrast is with the 'clean' sword wielded in the 'glorious' upper-class tradition of battles. A shillelagh, in the English opinion, was the creeping poverty-

stricken pedestrian Irish weapon of the dark, and of attacks of neighbour upon neighbour.

There's a sentence under the drawing reading 'With apologies to Lady Butler.' That stirred a memory: a cavalry charge aboard maddened white horses, galloping directly towards the viewer like an IMAX moment. I find that with that acknowledgement Merry was referring to the painter of *Scotland Forever – The Charge of the Royal Scots Greys at the Battle of Waterloo*, first exhibited in London, now in Leeds Art Gallery, Yorkshire.

That picture was a sensation. A line of Scottish cavalry is charging towards us. We, the viewers, safely standing staring at it from the floor of an art-gallery, are enemy French foot-soldiers standing bravely to receive the shock of the horses and be slaughtered at the Battle of Waterloo outside Brussels in June 1815. We are going to be overwhelmed, and our emperor, the Emperor of the French, Napoleon Bonaparte, of French Corsica, is going to be defeated and taken to St Helena in the Atlantic to die there, 1000 miles from the coast of Africa, on 5 May 1821, ten years before the birth of Labouchere.

The picture became famous all over Europe and the British Empire. Men doing what, in the general opinion of men in those days, men did best: struggling abroad on land and sea for their country, and for the womenfolk and children they'd been obliged to leave at home. Napoleon defeated. Instead of Britain and Ireland being excluded from the markets of continental Europe except on payment of high tariffs, as Napoleon was intending, Britain about to establish a mastery over land and sea around the world unparalleled since the Chinese in the 1400s!

I thought I'd better take a quick further look at Lady Butler, born in Switzerland in 1846, raised in Italy, dying in Ireland in 1933, yet English from start to finish, who became during the early 1870s the best-known painter in the world of un-mechanised land-war. Curiously, she was trained at a school run by one of Henry Labouchere's brothers-in-law.

Chapter 5 – Mimi Thompson

Lady Butler, pity about the married name. Schoolchildren today might be encouraged to learn about the British Empire though the story of the friendly sounding Mimi Thompson, rather than the awesome Lady Butler, who seems to exact deference. Even Mrs Butler would be more friendly, and Mimi was that for the first nine years of her marriage, before her husband William Butler from County Tipperary was knighted.

He was a graduate of the Monastery of the Men of the Plain (Fermoy), a British Army school in the County Cork, and in 1886 after helping expand the British Empire in Canada and Africa he became a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath. It was out of the question in Victorian days that Mimi keep her father's name after marriage, and unimaginable that *he*, in courtesy to her, become Sir William Thompson. So, she vanished into Lady Butler.

Mimi, her nickname, remains unexplained. Its short for Miriam or Emilia and she was neither. But Mimi is what her loving family called her. They seem to have been well-to-do, Victorian vagueness for not needing to work, and a parent or child seems to have been unhealthy, for Mimi was born in Switzerland where well-to-do Britishers with lung disorders went to breathe.

They wandered from Switzerland across continental Europe, which had been British-dominated and cheap to the British and Irish ever since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. When Mimi was sixteen, and presumably already painting, her parents allowed her to go to the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, like Michelangelo before her.

So she walked, presumably with her mother or her father or a brother, to and from daily along the Via Ricasoli, between the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and Piazza San Marco, the street where the David of Michelangelo is now kept indoors, though in her day it was outside the Palazzo Vecchio, wearing a

fig-leaf. The whole family, including herself, turned Roman Catholic.

They moved to London, possibly for her sake, in 1866, and aged twenty she enrolled at the Royal Female School of Art at 43, Queen Square, in Bloomsbury. Residential in term-time, twinned with a Male School of Art at Somerset House a mile to the south. The two weren't remotely like Central St Martins, the art-school of which they're part today. They were factories to serve factories.

They were intended to train male designers and ornamentors, particularly of the artisan class, for employment by British manufacturers. So, they were part of the drudgery end of the Industrial Revolution, no matter what the prospectus might say: hours of work painting on ceramic or fabric, often according to patterns supplied by other people so that there was none of the liberation of artistic creation.

The wonder is that Mimi Thompson or any other woman artist had successes. They should accept appropriate limits to the scope of their ambitions" said one early female pupil, clearly terrified. A Lady Superintendent managed matters day-to-day at the Female and teachers from the Male School were employed. A man was required, it was felt, to head the institution as fund-raiser and guarantor of respectability, and in Mimi Thompsons day it was a clergyman later raised to be Bishop of Rochester and Winchester.

He was Henry Labouchere's brother-in-law, Anthony Thorold (1825-1895), vicar of St Giles in the Fields in the Church of England, ten minutes' walk west past the British Museum with its Parthenon Marbles. Mimi and her parents perhaps met him socially as the academic year revolved. He married as his second wife - his first died very young in 1859 - Emily Labouchere, one of six sisters of Henry Labouchere (there were two younger brothers as well).

Emily and Anthony gave their only son Algar the middle name Labouchere, honouring her parentage. Algar was born in 1866, the year Mimi went to the Female School and the girls no doubt sent congratulations to their Principal in the form of a beautiful design.

Algar grew up to work as a journalist for his uncle and to write a 513-page memoir of Labouchere, published in 1913, to which this book is greatly indebted.

Unlike the men at the Male School in Somerset House and at the Royal Academy a mile to the west Mimi Thompson won't have been allowed into life-classes – that is, allowed to improve her figure-drawing by study of naked male models. But we do know from an 1868 print of women at work in a room at the Female that she would have seen plaster-casts of Greek and Roman statues.

These will have had looped over their middles. Natural curiosity may still have been satisfied. This year at the John Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, ten minutes south-east of the women's studios in Queen Square, there was and is an over life-size replica of the Apollo Belvedere, regarded by Victorians as the perfection of unclothed male beauty, and I see its anatomically complete and its fig-leaf hides nothing if you stand sideways to it.

So, she may have improved her drawing, and subsequently her painting, of clothed soldiers from the plaster-casts. Henry Labouchere's brother-in-law was a careful, cautious, quasi-precursor of Church of England feminism. Perhaps that's shown by his accepting a titular role at the Female, School, but most clearly, it's in his work reviving the early Christian notion of a female deacon - *deacon* from Greek-language *servant* or *helper*.

A deacon is a member of the clergy, but not a priest, and Thorold had no idea, so far as is known, of a female deacon becoming like a man an ordained priest in the Church of England. That had to wait until 1994. Thorold's female deacons were, instead, Martha's, the nickname for a hard-working woman. His female deacons have been defined in retrospect as a combination of nurse, social worker, and amateur policeman.

In 1884 William Woodall, Liberal MP for the potteries of Stoke-upon-Trent, a Midlands constituency full of women working on the decoration of fine china, including for Wedgwood, proposed in the House of Commons as an Amendment to a Bill

extending the numbers of grown men eligible to vote in country districts that “for all purposes connected with, and having to reference to, the right to vote at Parliamentary elections, words in the Representation of the People Acts importing the masculine gender [are to] include women.”

This was the Woodall Amendment: grown women were to have the right to attend selection meetings for MPs, to canvass the electorate on behalf of their preference - with arguments, not just with kisses, as had previously been the case - and the right to cast their vote by secret ballot at General Elections and by-elections. The right of grown women to participate in Parliamentary elections in Britain and Ireland in parity with men had been denied in the Representation of the People Bill (1832).

Even when it was only a convention that women shouldn't vote, before it was made expressly illegal in 1832, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) had protested the absurdity and the unfairness in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), now to be found stuffed in a corridor of the University of London, protested in print in 1818. He also, but in conversation, not daring to publish, called in the 1780s for an end to the British persecution of gays (the end was ordered in 2003).

He was picking up the ideas of Cesare Beccaria of Milan, who *did* famously publish his disgust at the judicial cruelties of European parliaments and monarchs, including their treatment of gays, in 1764. In 1844 Labouchere, like his leader W E Gladstone, voted *against* the Woodall Amendment. He had once, in 1867, voted *for* the grown women's franchise, when it was proposed by the philosopher-MP John Stuart Mill, a Liberal, but failed.

It failed again in 1884, by two hundred and seventy-one votes to one hundred and thirty-five.

In 1905, about to retire from the House of Commons, Labouchere explained his decision to vote *for* the Mill Amendment in 1867 and *against* the Woodall Amendment in 1884: “Every successive year [since 1864] “makes me more and more regret the

vote I then gave” [in favour of women having the Vote and ever since “I have endeavoured to make up for it as a penance by opposing the Women’s Franchise Bill tooth and nail.”

He continued in 1905: “In the consideration of the great problems which come before the Imperial Parliament”, he said, “women are certainly inferior intellectually to men... women are nervous, emotional, and have very little sense of proportion... women will be absolutely unified against the male portion of the community [if given the vote]... [it would] turn this venerable and respectable Parliament into an arena with a promiscuity of sexes...”

Thirteen more years, and thirty-four since the failure of the Woodall Amendment in 1884, and fifty-one since the Mill Amendment, and a hundred and twenty-six since Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, some women began to receive the Vote. It happened in 1918, but only after the European androicide.

It would be a hundred and eighteen years before the Labouchere Amendment of 1885, approved a year and one month and twenty-five days after the failed Woodall Amendment, was finally rescinded in 2003.

Labouchere was apparently less of a feminist than his brother-in-law, a Church of England bishop.
