



Order, Order!

The Newsletter of the Association of Former Members of Parliament

Winter 2007

Will You Please Welcome – Mr Tony Blair!



He has only been gone a few months and already some say he has been sadly missed.

The media seek him here, and they seek him there but our old friend Tony Blair has always been a strong supporter of our Association. So like John Major before him he didn't hesitate to sign up as a new member, and send us the £25 standing order for his subs straight away.

We have now recruited three former Prime Ministers to our list namely the late Jim Callaghan, John Major, and Tony Blair.

So do we have any members in the Lords who know Mrs Thatcher well enough to ask her to join the ranks of former Speaker Betty Boothroyd (currently starring on the "Antiques Road Show" and looking immaculate as always), and also the charming Lord Speaker, Helene Hayman, former MP for Welwyn Hatfield?

Mrs Thatcher's visit to Downing Street shows that time can heal all wounds.

We do send a copy of every issue of "Order Order" to her in the Lords and she would be most welcome if she joined us.

NOT DEAD YET!

The age old Parliamentary wisdom that there is nothing deader than an ex MP finally collapsed on Wednesday October 24 in the Members Dining room.



Lord Speaker Baroness Helene Hayman and Sir Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker in the Commons

Present were over seventy people including members of the Lords, MPs, former MPs, Heads of Departments and the Press Gallery who all received a copy of our major enquiry "LIFE AFTER LOSING AND LEAVING."

This report and in-depth investigation into who goes home and who goes back to Westminster when the ballot boxes are counted, is a splendid analysis, and a very good read too, carried out by the Leeds University School of Politics and International studies led by Professor Kevin Theakston, Dr Ed Gouge, and Dr Victoria Honeyman. Their team spent well over a year contacting and interviewing

Association members.

The audience gave a special welcome to the Lord Speaker Baroness Helene Hayman who lost her Labour seat in Welwyn Hatfield way back in 1979. Then after having 4 sons and being out for several years serving a long list of worthy causes, she was appointed to the House of Lords where she has been elected its Speaker.

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Dr Victoria Honeyman, Dr Ed Gouge, Eric Moonman, Professor Kevin Theakston, Joe Ashton (Chair), Alan Haselhurst and Elizabeth Peacock (Vice Chair)

Sir Alan Haselhurst the Deputy Speaker of the Commons and the Chairman of Ways and Means did us the honour of opening the proceedings. He too was a "retread" as the back benchers used to call "returnees", after losing Middleton and Prestwich in 1974, but he was soon back for the Conservatives in a 1977 by-election.

Prominent too was Lord Bruce Grocott the Chief Whip in the Lords who lost his Lichfield and Tamworth seat in 1979 then returned 8 years later, representing the Wrekin, before being headhunted into the Lords in 2001.

Deputy Chief Whip in the Lords, Bryan Davies was also there. His seat at Oldham vanished in boundary changes

in 1997 and there was nothing he could do about it.

Lord Ted Graham our lovely old "Godfather" recalled losing his seat in Enfield, and Eric Moonman, who had the brilliant idea of launching this enquiry, also recalled his sad experience at Basildon in 1979.

BALLOTS AND BOUNDARIES

Our Executive Committee members Sir Graham Bright, Elizabeth Peacock, Gwilym Jones, Alf Bates, Richard Tracey and George Cunningham remembered their exits, as did Edwina Currie, generously giving out fond memory kisses to both sides of the House.

There were many others who we haven't got space to mention, and

to thank, who were proud of the years they served until they were cut off by the ballots or the boundaries.

The BBC Radio 4 "PM" programme gave a very full report and analysis the day after, interviewing Joe Ashton and Sue Doughty (Lib Dem) who had lost her seat by 383 in 2005 after many recounts. "It was worse than having to sit through all those World Cup penalty shoot outs" Sue said.

BROKEN HEARTED

Regional newspapers like the Yorkshire Post also gave our survey extended coverage and ironically there is no doubt that if the General Election had been called in November, we would have added a whole new inside revelation, of what becomes of the broken hearted.

It was a warm comradely day with both sides of the chamber being reunited with those who were in the right place at the right time to fight again, and those who never got a second chance when the last orders of "Clear the Lobbies" was called.

Then, like all pensioners, we got stuck into the tea and cakes.

PIECE OF ADVICE

As we left the reception for "Life after Losing or Leaving" one old peer said "There is only one piece of advice worth giving to a defeated MP.

That is to sell their house and buy a pub in Coronation Street or Eastenders neighbourhood, if he is Labour, or a Basil Fawty boarding house in Hastings or Ramsgate if he is a Conservative.

Either way, they will have to work seven days a week, all hours God sends, to make a living, and rowing with their wife, being nice to people they can't stand, spending every evening counting the spoons, or the customers, or the billiard balls, and then worry all night about the competition next door.

Inside two months, they will feel just as much at home as they ever did in politics".

LAST PUFF ON MY PIPE – £170

It has been over two years now since the BBC asked some of us to record interviews for Tony Benn's obituary (well they do like to be first with the news and have special programmes ready for the sad day).



However Tony is still going strong at 82 and even threatening to stand again at the next General Election. He has already put in a bid for the safe Tory seat of Kensington.

It is doubtful if there isn't an MP anywhere in the House who hasn't been mentioned in the eight volumes of the "Benn Diaries" going back over 30 years, and his latest saga is as sharp, erudite, witty and well informed as ever.

He probably won't mind if we pinch a couple of stories of the hardship old age brings, before we review his book in full in our next issue of Order Order.

Thursday Feb. 2 2006.

"To Cambridge for the Cambridge Union debate. I got a taxi back to the station with five minutes to spare before the last train, and stood on the platform to have a last puff on my pipe.

All of a sudden the doors closed and the train pulled out of the station!

I had to get a cab and paid £170 to get from Cambridge to London. I felt such a bloody fool".

Saturday January 27 2007.

"I caught the train to Manchester and got there to be picked up for a meeting in Rochdale. No one turned up to meet me.

So I rang and they said it was tomorrow!

So I went back to London on a very slow train and wasted the whole bloody day.

I don't have many days left and I've wasted one of them. I was really, really angry"

Anyway if Tony does get to fight Kensington he will be able to revive the old story of the Labour candidate who canvassed Buckingham Palace in the 1945 election.

The butler opened the side door and said "Wait here, my man while I take instructions"

Twenty minutes later he came back and said "His Majesty the King, and also the Queen, never vote. However Lord Mountbatten will be voting Labour, but every single servant, and the whole of the Royal Household, including myself, will be voting for Mr Churchill.

Now bugger off and don't let me catch you round here again" Tony would love doing that.

NEW FACES

Our Executive Committee has co opted two newcomers following the resignations of Lord Bilston (Dennis Turner) and Andrew Welsh MSP.

We thank both Dennis and Andrew for their long service and understand their personal reasons for stepping down.



Alf Bates



Richard Tracey

ALF BATES was Labour Whip from 1974 – 1979 before losing his seat at Bebington. He went on to work for the BBC as a presenter and producer of regional and political programmes.

Later he became the economics and political researcher for the USDAW trade union, until he retired in 2001.

His expertise will be very helpful in printing and distributing "Order Order" and establishing contacts abroad.

RICHARD TRACEY was Conservative MP for Kingston and Surbiton before losing his seat to the Liberals by 56 votes in 1997.

He was a former BBC radio and TV news presenter and is still active in Wandsworth local, and London Assembly, politics. He is also a consultant for community relations at the new Battersea Power station project.

Importantly for us he has extensive knowledge of Information Technology and will be helping us to set up a website.

TO GO OR NOT TO GO? THAT IS THE QUESTION.

When Gordon Brown decided he wasn't going to call a General Election despite every expectation, it sparked off the biggest shock since Prime Minister Jim Callaghan did exactly the same thing almost 29 years to the day on September 7th, 1978.

Many of our members will remember it very well because with a Government majority of minus 17, their lives and jobs were about to seriously change.

Sunny Jim told the cabinet in the morning and then went straight to the TUC conference and taunted Mrs Thatcher singing "There was I waiting at the church.....Oh how it did upset me."

It upset many Labour MPs as well.

Even more so a few weeks later when on the day of the proposed election Labour comfortably held two seats in by-elections at marginal Berwick and East Lothian, and with a romping 11,000 majority for Geoff Lofthouse in Pontefract.

We asked some of our colleagues how they felt at the time.

Alf Bates, Labour. "In marginal Bebington I switched the TV on to watch Jim Callaghan's broadcast, holding my election plans, ready to drive a mile to see my agent.

As a Government whip that summer I heard growing voices that we shouldn't go in October, Wrong! I thought. So I asked Chief Whip Michael Cocks to call a special meeting to hear the whips advice.

What happened then shocked me. There was a clear majority for postponing.

Jim Tinn from the north east arrived late and whispered to me, October? I whispered back they are going for next year.

By nature Jim was always quiet and thoughtful but he stood up and said "If we don't go now we will suffer a winter of discontent", Jim was the first to use that Shakespearian forecast and he should be given a medal or a large footnote in history.

My request for the meeting had seriously backfired.

Two very good friends in the whips office, Ann Taylor and Frank White, also had highly marginal seats. They said stay. And both survived. I lost mine by 486. Ann Taylor survived by 600 and Frank White by 38. They must have known their constituencies better than I did.

It goes to show that calling elections is a difficult business and it hasn't got any easier."

Dame Peggy Fenner, Conservative had lost her Rochester and Chatham seat by 2,400 in 1974, but regained it in 1979 by 2,680.

Now a grand 85 year old veteran (delighted at just having had her cataracts seen to) Peggy said "I don't remember a damn thing. However I was a junior minister in four departments and

I do remember Jim Callaghan stepping off a plane at Heathrow all fit and suntanned in January and saying "Crisis? What crisis? "When all of Britain was freezing in the snow with power cuts and half the unions on strike. Ted Heath came to help me in Chatham, he comes from there. That's what got me in."

Eric Moonman, Labour had a majority of 10,500 in 1974 but lost by 5,100 in 1979 in Basildon due to massive changes in the constituency with the electorate increasing from 92,000 to 103,000, and the Liberal vote switching to the Tories.

Eric says "Calling it off was a great error. Callaghan could lead his troops but he was a very bad general and not at all astute. Personally in the days after the election I could have gone round to the House and killed him! Especially during the months I was unemployed and had to start a career all over again. But I mellowed and realised he meant well."

Richard Alexander, Conservative. "That September I thought that we might just win Newark which had been Labour for 15 years. However there was an enormous change of mood the day after Jim Callaghan made his decision and that really turned the tide.

His waiting at the church joke totally backfired. A Labour majority of 5,770 turned into Tory gain of 1,750 and an 8 per cent swing."

Neil Thorne, Conservative (Ilford South). "The delay was very annoying and painful but definitely beneficial, we were on a knife edge in September but the delay gave us the time to organise 7 teams of canvassers working every day, afternoon and evening, six days a week, and we changed a Labour majority of 1,700 into a Tory majority of 1,600.

Unfortunately 13 years later we lost the seat by 402, and Mike Gapes has had it ever since."

Maureen Colquhoun, Labour. "I was having lots of problems with my constituency party in Northampton and I wasn't bothered when the election came because I knew we would lose.

If I could have got rid of the bloody lot of them in the local party I would have felt a lot happier.

There was a swing of 8 per cent to the Conservative turning a 1,500 Labour majority into 4,600 for the Tories.

Life seemed terribly bleak then. MPs salaries were only £7,500 a year with few allowances. I was unemployed for 18 months after the defeat, so I suppose I was glad of the seven months extra wages."

Fellowship Cartoons

Many of our members have fond memories of their voluntary service at various large companies organised by the Industry and Parliament Trust.

They were proud to be awarded Fellowships and many of them in marginal seats with growing apprehension as elections approached, were thankful to add this variety of experience to their CV.



All too many MPs in the House have a vast experience of law, finance or education, but are almost illiterate about how business and industry works.

In Portcullis House from Monday 3rd December to Friday 7th the Trust will be showing an exhibition of their Fellowship cartoons.

This superb collection of sketches is mainly the work of the late George Gale caricaturist from the House magazine and David E Smith the current caricaturist.

To mark the conclusion of the 30th anniversary the Trust is hosting a reception for all Fellows on Tuesday December 4th on the Terrace from 7pm to 9pm.

If interested in attending, call Sharon Bray on 0207 839 9412.

Sir Graham Bright Luton. "Local parties and candidates were in limbo after the announcement, but it did give us extra time to mobilise.

We might just have won Luton in September but undoubtedly the extra months of preparation and the bad weather clinched it. The 6 per cent swing got us in with a majority of 843."

Lord Ted Graham sums it up. "I was in the Labour whips office from 1976 to 1983 looking after the odds and sods battalion of 31 MPs ranging from East Anglia to Devon, Bristol, Medway, and the New Towns.

I waved goodbye to them as though they were going to the Somme.

Only 15 came back.

At the next General Election in 1983, only 3 came back, and I wasn't one of them.

I too was one of the catastrophic losses.

In the queue to sign on at the Employment Exchange, I was asked, what are you doing here? And, if we had known

there was an election we would have voted for you!

Fortunately the tide of politics takes us out, and the tide of politics brings us in.

A few weeks later I was offered a seat in the Lords."

Finally can we pass on these words of wisdom from one of our grand old Conservatives who does not wish to have his name revealed, he says:-

"Young Cameron was guilty of premature ejaculation. If he had saved his tax cuts policy until after the election had been called, he would have soared up the polls with Brown unable to pinch it.

The Liberals would have been saddled with Ming Campbell throughout the campaign, and we would have won at least 40 seats."

Ah well, when did anybody in the Downing Street headquarters ever listen to poor bloody infantry like us?

NEW SECURE ACCESS SYSTEM



Members need to note that new security passes are being issued in time for the new ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM which is being phased in throughout Westminster early in 2008.

Please collect your new pass when you next visit Westminster. You will need to take your existing pass to the Pass Office, and exchange it for a new one.

The staff there will explain how the new system will work.

If you have any queries, the enquiry number for the Pass Administration Office in 1 Canon Row, is 0207 219 5920 or 5915.

Many of our members have requested that our Association should have its own pass to prove membership and as a souvenir rather like a credit card but undoubtedly the best forms of recognition and proof is the House of Commons pass with your name and photograph on it which is an official credit card sized document lasting for six years.

It's a family heirloom for the grandkids too.

Please apply now. The Pass office staff are really helpful at arranging photographs without any appointment.

NOSTALGIA AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

Panning the Cameras

The way the TV cameras now show the proceedings of the House may soon be changed.

It was back in 1989 following various votes spread over six parliaments going back to 1972, that the old veterans of the house were finally voted down by young and vain newcomers, who thought they would become the new good looking stars of Channel 4 and breakfast television. And some of them did.

But sadly rules were laid down that only those MPs called to speak would be shown on the screen, crib sheet in hand.

The Yah, Yah, jeers and pearls of irony, cruel put downs, and the silent rude gestures and mime, would continue to be jammed by the BBC, who were not covered by Parliamentary privilege, and terrified of daily writs from m' learned friends.

ASSASSINATION AND COMEDY

Until 1989 where had there been a West End show with better plots, scenery, characters, drama, back stabbing assassination and comedy, than the Westminster Palace?

It ran four nights a week and all free for the gallery queue.

Who could ever forget the future Lord Kinnock and leader of the



Labour Party standing up and conducting the back bench rebels into a mighty chorus of Martin Luther King's "We shall

overcome some day", to protest on behalf of the unions. Although half of the chorus appeared to be singing the words of "We shall not, we shall not be moved!" from the Spion Kop terraces.

BUDGET DAY

Budget day wasn't Budget day without the Scots whisky lobby handing out free wee drams all morning, and putting half of Glasgow's back benchers to sleep all through the Chancellor's speech in the afternoon. Except of course for Tom Swain wearing his miner's helmet, and Gerald Nabbaro tipping his top hat to the city vultures in the gallery.

What a shame that all the pearly shafts of wit were never recorded in Hansard, but simply blurred into BBC farmyard rumbles.

ROYAL WAND

Who could forget the monthly ritual of the Vice Chamberlain of the Royal Household, bringing messages from the Queen? Usually it was the splendid Tristan Garel-Jones, chosen by the whips, immaculate in Fred Astaire tailcoat and humbug trousers, who majestically carried the Royal Wand upright like a snooker cue.

As he solemnly paced the floor towards the bar Dennis Skinner



typical idle skiving backbencher

(obviously nicknamed Dennis the Menace after the kid in the Beano) would be waiting to pounce like a panther.

As Tristan walked backwards, graciously nodding to the Speaker, Dennis would pull out a packet of Polo mints and deftly use one to put some chalk on the bottom of the cue. What an uproar! It never failed.

Geoffrey Dickens all 20 stones of him, much loved and now not with us, would be on his feet shouting "Mr Speaker The Vice Chamberlain has just had his Royal Wand chalked! Is that in order?"

Meanwhile Skinner, proud of his back bench official title of the "Keeper of the Cloth Cap", would stand up and make a Shakespearian bow and flourish to the delighted gallery.

What a good job the Queen never saw it.

HORSE MANURE

And what about the memorable day, when Westminster Hall had just been bombed by hand grenades from the IRA? That's when the security was really tightened up with bag searches and new passes for all.

Which did not stop the daughter of the Prime Minister of Malta from staggering down the steps of the Public Gallery, looking nine months pregnant, gingerly assisted to the front row by caring ushers.

There she quietly unbuttoned her coat, took out a huge polythene bag of horse manure, and flung it at the despatch box, shouting IRA slogans.

Unfortunately she didn't have the strength to reach the front bench and it hit Dennis Skinner, burst on his shoulder, and went down his neck.

Naturally the Speaker jumped up and called "Order, Order" only for Neil Kinnock to challenge his ruling and ask, surely it should be "Ordure, Ordure"?

Inside an hour the permanent wits of Annes Bar had decided that this event should have its own place in history, and because of the Irish connection, and the smash hit film then filling the West End, the event should go down as "De Close Encounter of De Turd Kind"

WILY OLD VETERANS

No MPs then ever demanded that cameras should be brought in. Except Austin Mitchell MP for Grimsby a former idol and star of "Ee Bah Gum" Yorkshire Television in Leeds, who had taken a very big pay cut to become an M.P.

Those wily old veterans all knew that live television would lead to mischievous constituency watchdogs, and opponents especially in their own parties demanding mandatory reselection for their safe seats. They would always want to know why he never got on his feet to challenge the Prime Minister about the waiting list for verrucas in Victoria Hospital,



Keith Vaz and Diane Abbott. New stars of 1987.

instead of banging on about the Common Market.

But finally, with Mrs Thatcher in deep trouble following the miners strike, her advisors caught on that a 60 year old lady being viciously harangued and abused and shouted down at the despatch box, would pull in a massive sympathy vote from the women readers of the "Daily Mail".

So why not try it? All it needed was a three line whip instead of the usual free vote, plus a new intake of marginals in 1987 of new good looking MPs and the House would become Top of the Pops.

Unfortunately, at the opening of Parliament in 1989 for its first ever televised Queen's Speech the paparazzi jumped the gun and invaded the press gallery as soon as the first doors opened, then took candid camera shots of everybody and anybody.

LIPSTICK

Naturally the vivacious Diane Abbott, even then a TV pro and now TV superstar, immediately turned her best profile to the gallery for a historic shot of the first black woman MP, starting work by putting her lipstick on. Keith Vaz also smiled and waved.

Bernie Grant a leading campaigner for black sections in the Labour Party paraded in his full tribal robes, and the gullible innocent who was the first to arrive in the empty chamber

to claim his usual seat, and quite naturally put his feet up to wait and read the papers, found himself splashed over nine front pages as a typical idle skiving backbencher always wanting more money.

BLUNKETT'S DOG

But the real star was Blunkett's dog. What a pro! Aloof and disclaimful, he sat unmoved.

All politicians should know never to appear with kids or animals. The next day's Fleet Street pictures hardly showed one of Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher.

Now almost 20 years on, the spark, fire and crackle, of the old PMs question time has vanished.

REAL POLITICS

Four days after Gordon Brown called off the highly expected General Election, and then had to face a furious David Cameron at the box, was a lonely magnificent reminder of what real politics is all about.

There was a time many years ago when Prime Ministers refused to answer constituency questions. These didn't even get past the Table office. Questions about local hospitals, or buses, or schools etc were simply transferred to the Minister who covered this department.

Now, we old pensioners sitting at home every Wednesday lunchtime, like Blunkett's dog waiting for the dinner bell to ring, often fall asleep at some of the parish pump pap which passes for highly paid professional politics these days.

Wouldn't it be nice if the Administration Committee who will make the final decision announced that in future all the words and all the pictures which are heard, and seen from the Public Gallery, should be shown in full to all viewers?

The duels, the jokes and the scandals would make a wonderful soap opera. The History Channel Today we could call it.

It would even star Blunkett's dog.

Roy. The Boy From Barnsley.



Lady Madge and Roy Mason

It's a proud place is Barnsley.

Immortalised by award winning films such as "Kes" and "Brassed Off" with its pit closure brass bands, it's the home of the Yorkshire Miners Union, the toughest guys in the whole British working class history.

Barnsley doesn't hand its awards to any Tom, Dick and Harry, Michael Parkinsons or Arthur Scargills, but only to its treasured heroes like Test Match umpire Dickie Bird or, now, to Lord Roy Mason.

Roy has just been given the Freedom of the Borough of Barnsley, and says he is absolutely delighted to accept such a wonderful honour.

Young Roy left school at 14 when he was five feet tall and still growing, to go down Wharnccliffe Colliery.

He grew up in a pit village terrace house with its tin bath hanging on the outside wall (no pit head baths then) and a "privy midden" at the bottom of the back yard (no flush toilets either).

Now at the grand age of 83, he and Lady Madge still travel down to London every week to put in four full shifts in the Lords. While Roy does the business in the Upper Chamber, Madge goes swimming in the pool at the Queen Mother Sports Centre in Victoria.

Roy was 21 when he married Madge, aged 20, and they are devoted to their children and grandchildren.

AVERAGE MAJORITY 28,000

In 1953 at the age of 28, Roy was chosen by the Barnsley miners to fight a by-election, and in the following 10 Parliaments and for 34 years, he had a 28,000 majority average.

In four Labour cabinets Roy held jobs covering the Postmaster General, President of the Board of Trade, Secretary of State for Energy, Defence Secretary, and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Although Roy does admit he was never popular with his civil servants and staff at any department he controlled. He could never get out of the miners' habit of starting work early and was always at his desk by 6.30am with the chauffeurs and staff desperately struggling to keep pace.

It was Roy who decided that the National Exhibition Centre would be built in Birmingham, and ignited the wrath of the City of London.

He decided too that there would be a new nuclear power station, but only if the Cabinet agreed to a coal fired power station as well. Which led to the building of Drax, not very far from the Barnsley pits, and the biggest coal fired power station in Europe.

MAXIMUM SECURITY

But it was tough guy Roy who took on the hardest job in the Cabinet by standing up to the IRA when he became Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1976 to 1979.

The Leader of the IRA Provisionals, Martin McGuinness (now power sharing with Ian Paisley in the Northern Ireland Assembly and writing for the House magazine) swore, "It was Roy Mason who made the most impact and kicked the shit out of us by locking our men up in the Maze".

Days before the 1979 Parliament ended, Tory MP and World War Two veteran Airey Neave was blown up in his car as he drove up the ramp of the members' car park. Which meant that for the next 25 years Roy and Madge had to have maximum security cover at all times, with two armed plain clothed police driving them everywhere and sleeping in a shelter outside their Barnsley front door.

Even when Roy went fishing (and Roy loves fishing even more than he loves Barnsley football) the bodyguards would check the secret location.

LORDS SMOKING AREA

Next to fishing Roy cherished his pipe; it is amazing how many ex colliers, banned from smoking down the pit, spent the rest of the day polluting their lungs.

So not only did Roy form a Commons and Lords smoking group and strongly oppose the new legislation on smoke free premises, he has since managed to have a small stretch of the Lords Terrace designated as an outside smoking area, just like any posh pub in London.

Although sadly he has now had to switch to cigars because the new rules simply make a pipe "too fiddly to be messing about with."

Today with the security vigil relaxed a bit, Roy is an astonishing example of how the 20th Century British parliamentary system of democracy and government worked better, and covered a wider cross section of the population, than ever it could today. What a wonderful world we lived in.

Where We Stand In The European League



Bowen Wells has been to Brussels on our behalf to represent our association, and to meet other European former members of their legislatures, to take part in a survey of their activities and facilities. We give his report.

The meeting of the countries was based on the members of the Council of Europe and therefore included Turkey and Switzerland. The European Parliament also has its own association of former members. They too attended but did not take part.

The various ways, in which other countries fund and treat their retired or defeated politicians, is very interesting.

We have around 340 members (the obituaries take their toll). Belgium has 350. France 574. Germany 690. Spain 950. Italy 1,400. Turkey 2,200 and the European Parliament 500.

Governments providing cash subsidies include the UK with £6,000. Luxemburg £6,250. Belgium £12,000. Others are not shown, but some receive substantial help.

Our group has an approximate annual income of around £15,000. Belgium has £18,000. Germany has £95,000. Spain £190,000. Italy £194,000. Turkey £20,000 and the Republic of Ireland £35,000. The full figures are very difficult to judge because of other types of subsidies.

However our membership fee of £25 a year, is the fifth highest of all eleven countries.

FREE "ORDER ORDER"

Most of our income goes on sending out three free copies of "Order Order" every year, plus other mailshot letters and publications, and the House of Commons Commission provides us with a free equipped office in Abbey Gardens, plus the one day a week wages of our administrator.

We also intend to spend some money on Information Technology very shortly.

Some other Parliaments are served by the equivalent of our Clerks Department, in Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal and Switzerland. Most have part time staff except for France, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey who have full time staff and Turkey has 12!

SPECIAL ACCESS

In both British Houses ex MPs are not granted special access to the sessions of Parliament, except by queuing for the public gallery, but all other European governments provide privileged access for theirs.

Some even allow ex members to address the House, or its committees, with permission of the Speaker!

The passes we now have, restrict us to one bar and one cafeteria for one person. All of Europe grant much more freedom and access.

Four Parliaments pay for all postage and stationary costs, but those with higher incomes supply their own.

WEBSITES

Many of the Associations are organised similar to our own, in terms of administration and meetings and eight of them had websites paid for by their governments.

Most of them attended a reception given by their Speaker once a year and paid for by their Speaker, like our patron Speaker Michael Martin provides for us. We owe a great deal of our development to his longstanding support and advice.

A number of the other countries have regular discussions on subjects such as the future of Europe, immigration and terrorism, and send their members views to their governments, or meet ministers occasionally.

Commonwealth associations were not included in this survey which was organised by Spain, but we are currently also corresponding with Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the U.S.A.

We have written to them asking about their activities and hope to cover their replies in a further article.

Clearly our Association has not done badly from a standing, penniless, start back in 2001. However we do have along way to go before we can turn our wide experience and high quality knowledge of Government and constitutional history into a valuable educational tool for our own young people.

Bowen Wells is a founder member of our Association and a member of our Executive Committee specialising in overseas contacts. He was the Conservative MP for Hertford and Stortford from 1979 to 2001.

He is a specialist with long Parliamentary experience in the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the CPA, Overseas Development and European legislation.

DATA PROTECTION? OR DEPARTMENT PROTECTION?

In our ranks of over 330 members we are proud to include an enormous range of skills and talent ranging from ex – Chancellors of the Exchequer, cabinet ministers, legal eagles, fighter pilots, professors and coal miners.

Unfortunately we have not yet found an expert on the Data Protection Act and we badly need one!

We estimate that there are over 600 former MPs but we cannot trace them, because we cannot get their addresses.

Please. Don't ask us to contact the Commons post office. The officials are adamant that the Data Protection Act prevents from giving out the addresses of our colleagues. Even though we are all badgered daily by junk mail which obviously comes from somebody who buys the data.

Why don't we look in "Who's Who?" We have. And searched page after weary page. Unfortunately so do many cunning burglars. So every famous name today does not print his or her address or telephone number.

Ask the Pensions Fund? We have - and been abruptly refused;

MEMBERS FUND

For some years now we have been struggling to get our own Trustees on the Members Fund too, which, since 1938 has been compulsorily collecting a levy of £2 a month from every sitting MP, and also cash from the Treasury, for hardship cases, and has piled up a surplus of nearly £4 million.

We think that as probably half of that money was paid in by ex MPs, we should be allowed to have a seat on the committee. Especially as the committee is wanting to alter the rules, and give a large sum back to the Treasury, while increasing and standardising payments to hardship cases and widows.



Gwilym Jones

Our executive member Gwilym Jones former MP for Cardiff North from 1983 to 1997, a qualified insurance and pensions broker, was a director of Bowrings and a

Junior Minister at the Welsh Office from 1992 to 1997.

RESEARCH

He has done a great deal of research into the background of the Fund, and prepared a paper which we support entirely. We think Gwilym would be an excellent choice to represent our Association on the Trustees.

Unfortunately the Trustees would not agree to him even being an observer at their meetings.

They said "they were minded to seek legal advice about Data Protection issues, and that it would be inappropriate to

have an observer present at meetings which largely considered individual applications"

Actually over 80 of our members are also sitting Members of the House of Lords; Are they too not trustworthy enough to take part and sit in judgment?

It took a long struggle to persuade the Parliamentary Pensions Fund to appoint one of our members to their Board of Trustees.

INSIDE THE TENT

It was only when we told them that we could not prevent individual ex MPs from our association appealing to the Pensions Ombudsman, and also the Parliamentary Ombudsman, about the overpayments fiasco, that the trustees remembered the first law of negotiation - which is that it is better to keep some people inside the tent spitting out, rather than have them outside the tent spitting in.

Our members are very angry at this rejection. We are being urged to complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, and to the 1922 Conservative Committee, and the Parliamentary Labour Party, whose members are still paying money in, and to our colleagues in the Lords asking them to table questions as to the way in which our contribution money is being used.

We are reluctant to make this and other disputes public but after years of continual refusals we just have no other avenues when departments of the House, regularly use the Data Protection Act, to block our legitimate right to organise, and protect all former members of Parliament.

Your suggestions and advice will be welcome.

In Off The Post & Passbacks

Some of the annual grant we now receive from the House of Common Commission (about £6000 per annum) is now being used to send out extra pages for Order Order.

Consequently we can welcome short interesting letters and comments from our members about what we have said, or should have said, and done.

We can even take adverts (free) from members who perhaps have a holiday home, gite, apartment etc, and might wish to let it out to other members, or even do a house swap (don't forget to ask the dog).

Names and addresses will be kept confidential and passed on as requested.



OBITUARIES

Remembering Two Members of our Association



LORD BIFFEN OF TANAT

November 3rd 1930 to August 14th 2007

It can be said of many politicians whether they perform on the national or local stage, that they were nice and highly respected – epitaphs which fit John Biffen like the proverbial glove.

He was one of the few speakers in the House, who, when his name appeared on the TV screen, could immediately attract other members to the chamber.

Famously he was ousted from his high office as Leader of the House when he spoke out against the policies of Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher which produced the caustic comment from her Press Supremo Bernard Ingham, that John was "semi detached from the government and its policies".

Later John got his revenge by saying that Ingham "was the sewer, not the sewerage of the policies".

While others muttered behind Mrs Thatcher's back he dared to take her on at the Cabinet table, only to be the subject of her shrieking blasts and condemnation for not supporting her unloved policy of the poll tax.

After being defeated by Dick Crossman in Coventry East in 1959 John entered the House in 1961 representing Oswestry then Shropshire North until he went into the Lords in 1997.

He was not a success in his first two cabinet posts in the

Treasury and at Trade and Industry, but blossomed as Leader of the House in 1982, until he was dropped following the 1987 election after describing his role as "an unashamed boss's nark".

It was then as Leader that he had to robustly defend the policies of Mrs Thatcher, while behind the scenes he became more and more unhappy at the cuts in public expenditure, with Nigel Lawson gaining wild applause for his 1988 Budget reductions.

That's when John was heard to say "That's all very well, but I smell inflation".

And so it proved.

His style at the box every Thursday was always humorous and entertaining. Once when fencing with Dennis Skinner he turned to Dennis and warned "Us ex – grammar school boys must stick together".

The House loved it and I gladly share the view that John was the best Leader of the House in recent times.

Sadly John had suffered from kidney failure for some years but he was blessed when he married Sarah Wood, one of his secretaries, and became the proud and benign stepfather to her two children.

John readily became a founder member of our ex MPs association and our sympathy and consolations are extended to Sarah and her children at this time.

Ted Graham



LORD GILMOUR OF CRAIGMILLAR

July 8th 1926 - September 21st 2007

When Ian Gilmour passed away the Guardian obituary read "Leading Tory sacked by Thatcher for supporting everything she loathed."

I understood then everything from his book "Dancing with Dogma" which may have been a skit on Ian's

famous twirl with the Iron Lady on the dance floor at a party conference, when he energetically swung her round a bit too vigorously.

Ian's star rose under Ted Heath. He was in Mrs Thatcher's first cabinet in 1979, and the first to be sacked in 1981.

He had served in the Grenadier Guards from 1944 to 1947 with Lord Carrington, who was to become a key player in Tory cabinets, until he too was dismissed for events surrounding the Falklands war.

Ian, educated at Eton and Balliol, married well as they say, when he met Lady Caroline Margaret Montagu-Douglas Scott, the daughter of the Duke of Buccleuch.

He was then called to the Inner Temple Bar in 1972, and it was then he began to reveal his liberal tendencies when he bought "The Spectator" employing the likes of writers Brian Inglis, Henry Fairlie and Bernard Levin, and establishing its credentials as a magazine worth reading.

It was during the Suez crisis that it called the Conservatives' Prime Minister Anthony Eden "a liar".

Nevertheless Ian gained the safe seat of Chesham and Amer-sham in 1962 during Harold McMillan's Premiership, and over the next few years Ian established his stance of "Tory Wet" when he voted against the death penalty, supported the European Community, campaigned against censorship of books and theatres, and supported the legislation on homosexuality.

Out of office his voting record showed a litany of being right, when Mrs Thatcher was wrong. He voted against abolishing the Greater London Council, voted for local councils to keep the money from selling council houses, voted against a freeze in child benefits, opposed the poll tax, and voted against the mad idea of compulsory identity admission cards for football fans just after the Hillsborough disaster, when 96 of them, mainly children, had been crushed to death.

His languid speaking style was easy to listen to, but as one of his colleagues observed "Ian could box but couldn't punch" an essential requirement at the despatch box.

Ian was perhaps too early for his time. Always a good companion with his friends in all parties, he never had many, if any, enemies in both houses, and all say it was a privilege to have known him.

He was one of the founder members of our Association and our deepest condolences go to his wife Caroline and his children.

Ted Graham

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Summer Reception



We are enormously grateful to our Patron, Mr Speaker, who again offered us his hospitality in Speaker's House for our annual reception on the 17th July.

