



Order, Order!

The Newsletter of the Association of Former Members of Parliament

Spring 2009

HELLO – I'M BORIS



In the last two years 'Order, Order' has warmly welcomed ex Prime Ministers Tony Blair and John Major into our ranks.

Now we are delighted to report that Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, has joined us.

'Hello, Hello, Hello. I am Boris', he says with polished fogley aplomb.

According to one Sunday paper, that is how he welcomes visitors to London's City Hall (and that he has been nicknamed Bojo by his staff).

But our members are more used to jumping off the pavements of Westminster when his push bike appears. Then seeing this lovable rogue, with enormous talent, both on and off the page, or on the green leather benches, or even "Have I Got News For You" on BBC TV.

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"THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT."

IT WAS EXACTLY 30 YEARS AGO.

ALL OUR JOBS, OUR SEATS, AND EVEN OUR LIVES DEPENDED ON ONE SINGLE VOTE OR ABSTENTION. INCLUDING MURDER IN THE CAR PARK TWO DAYS LATER.
SEE BACK PAGE

We Proudly Present Ernest, Our Oldest Member!

AS THE 1935 Parliament was ending in April 1945, having stretched through the war years, the sitting Conservative MP for Chelmsford, Colonel John McNamara was killed on active service in Italy.

Chelmsford was then the sixth largest Conservative majority in the country, with a 16,624 majority.

When the war began a truce was made between the Conservatives and Labour parties who agreed that by-elections would be unopposed, and the seat handed to the sitting party.

But almost at the end of the war, a new Common Wealth party had sprung up. The conscripted young men and women in the forces were angry. They were confident and passionate about peace and demanded a change to the old routine.

Common Wealth inspired by J B Priestley and Richard Ackland decided to immediately fight the by-election, just two or three weeks before the 1945 General Election was called.

The writ was quickly moved and polling day fixed for 17 days later.

For the first time in history the two party system was thrown out of the window.

The candidate Common Wealth selected was 29 year old Wing Commander Ernest Millington DFC, chosen after a ten minute interview in a railway station waiting room.

Ernest was a public school boy thrown out of his home by his father at the age of 16, homeless and jobless with only half a crown in his pocket.

He entered politics at the Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, standing on soap boxes, and was sacked from his office job for doing so.

Yet at the age of 29, in 17 days, he reaped the whirlwind to turn a 16,634

Tory majority into a 6,431 majority for Common Wealth.

The truce between the three other parties had been smashed.

The Daily Mirror adopted Ernest and to his embarrassment made it public that the Wing Commander was flying through the flack to blitz Berlin, while his Tory opponent, a mere Flight Lieutenant, was signing important papers at a desk job with the Air Ministry.

AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED TO ERNEST?

Well believe it or not, he is still alive and well and living in France at the age of 93 and he has become our latest member!

Ernest was actually a Member of Parliament three months before the current Speaker Michael Martin was born, and well before Tony Benn in 1950.

And what a story he has to tell in his exciting book (shown on the cover)!

When he arrived at Big Ben he wore on his uniform his newly awarded Distinguished Flying Cross (sewn on expertly by himself).

Another MP from the Conservative party who happened to be a RAF Police Squadron Leader one rank below Wing Commander, eyed him up and down and bellowed "You are improperly dressed! Your DFC medal ribbon is too wide".



Millington's reply was devastating "If you are talking to me as an RAF officer then stand to attention and address a senior officer as Sir. If you are talking to me as a fellow MP mind your own business and bugger off".

He buggered off.

Parliament was a great let down for Ernest. He was 29, the youngest MP, and in his own party of one, but he still held his seat in the General Election before joining the Labour party.

The MP's salary then was £1,000 a year. And that was it! No allowances. No mileage, only railway warrants. He had to drive one and a half hours every day from Chelmsford to the House in an old banger and another one and a half hours at 10.30pm every night to avoid hotel bills;

His wife and four children were shunned by the local people and his family were rearing chickens, and growing vegetables, to make ends meet.

Edith Summerskill was his friend at the House. Ernest was the youngest member in it. All electoral activities previously had been put on the back burner for nine years, and there was a very large number of sitting MP's who "were showing signs of deprecation".

Some were on crutches, some were in invalid chairs, and others had old fashioned hearing aids and ear trumpets.

Dr Summerskill told him that 20% of the members since the 1935 election had a physical disability and 27% were mentally impaired.

Ernest found it difficult to get called by the Speaker (as all new boys do in minority parties) but managed to defiantly stand up and state "that we in the House who served in Bomber Command, want a categorical assurance, that the work we did was mentally and strategically justified".

Ernest clearly remembers the post war giants of Churchill, Cripps, Bevan, Morrison, etc. very well and Manny Shinwell, Tom Driberg, John Belcher, were among his many friends.

But the voters returned to tradition in 1950 and Ernest was then back on the dole. It resulted in financial difficulties familiar to our members in our Association who lose their seats.

He sold encyclopaedias door to door and rejoined the RAF for a time. He taught as a teacher in run down schools, and eventually became a local authority head of education.

Following the death of John Profumo in March 2006, who had entered Parliament during the war, Ernest realised he had become the only living ex MP who joined the House before the General Election of 1945.

Now he lives with his second wife in the Dordogne. He has reached the age of 93 as the last surviving member of the 1935 Parliament, which had a Conservative majority of 247 seats.

Only 40% of the 124,000 Bomber Command Air Crew survived the war without serious injury or death, and



Censored Election photo 1945

Ernest's ambition is to live to be 100 in good health.

This is an unputdownable book for all historians and politicians. We are glad to say we have now appointed Ernest as a life member of our Association and we will apply to the Speaker for his Parliamentary Roll of Honour Certificate.

Researched and written by barrister and journalist Roy Roebuck, Labour MP for Harrow East 1966 - 1970.

Was That Really Me? by Ernest Millington is available from www.amazon.co.uk ISBN 1596820764 £9.99

Acknowledgement to Rt Hon Peter Lilley

Following our report on the Members Fund Review in the last issue of 'Order, Order' the RT Hon Peter Lilley MP, who is Chairman of the Trustees, has informed us of the progress made and that the 1981 Act of "one off" payments to claimants are going up to a maximum of £5,000.

The Treasury is also to take responsibility for the "As of Rights Pensioners" i.e. those for MP's who departed without any eligible form of pension.

In 2005 the Members Fund assets had risen to £4.2 million but sadly the latest valuation (October 2008) is down to £3.4 million, following the banks and stock market turmoil.

Thus it is unlikely that any monies will be returned to the Treasury.

It was especially pleasing too when Peter told us that "John" the 80 year old former MP we had highlighted, is being helped by the fund.

However we feel that our Association should nevertheless be closely involved through one or more nominated Trustees, as already happens with the Parliamentary Pension Fund.

The Members Fund says their legal advice presently precludes even an observer. Yet if we had been involved, then we could have reported this information in the last issue of 'Order, Order' and worked together with the members of the fund, without any friction.

Officials from the Members Fund secretariat, the Leaders Office, the Treasury Solicitors Office, and the Legal Services of the House, were to meet last December to discuss taking forward the reviews.

The Trustees state they have no objection in principal to our being represented on their board, and when we meet the Deputy Leader of The House, Chris Bryant MP we will again press our case.

Gwilym Jones

Executive Committee Member and our nominated specialist, Conservative MP for Cardiff North 1983-1997, a former Minister in the Welsh Office and a Director of Baring Wales Ltd.

Editors note: *Unfortunately our meeting with Chris Bryant on Monday Feb 2 had to be postponed because heavy falls of snow closed the London Transport system and blocked all roads from the provinces. We will try to get another date shortly.*

NOSTALGIA AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

THE NOBLE ART OF THE TUMMLER.

This is the time of year for Chancellors to deliver their Budget and Town Halls to cause dismay levying the Council Tax.

I left school at 15 but was fortunate enough to study politics in trade union seminars, and my mentor was Alderman Issy Lewis, the chair of the Sheffield City Council Finance Committee.

Issy knew more about politics than any tutor at Oxford or Cambridge, and I was his bag carrier. Personally selected because I could use a slide rule. Computers hadn't been invented in 1963. Neither had colour television or local radio.

Issy owned a cutlery factory, and had two daughters in a kibbutz in Israel. He was a real socialist.

"Joseph, remember my boy," he would say, "it is always better to employ a thief than a fool. A thief has to make a bit, take a bit and leave a bit for you, whereas a fool makes nothing."

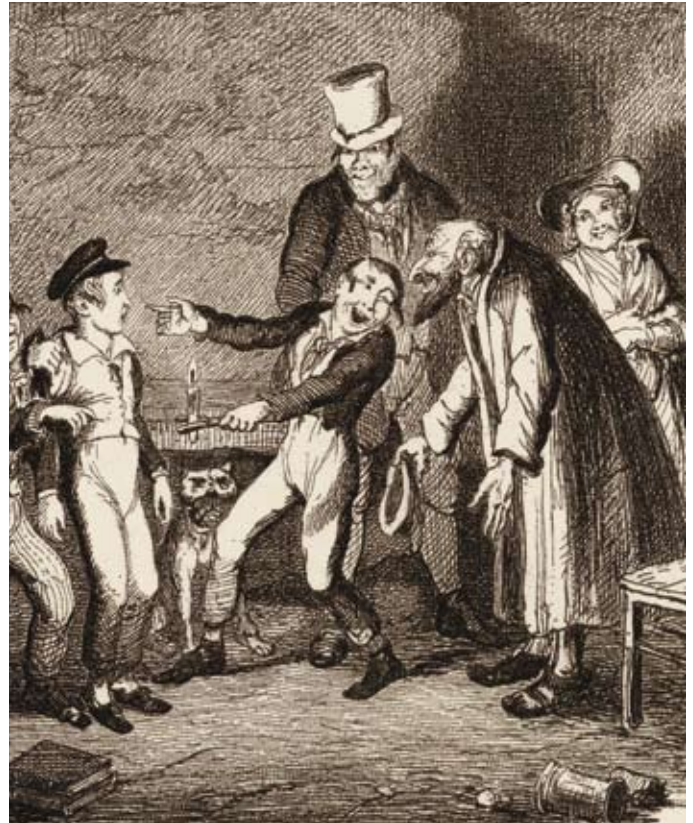
But the Labour councillors ignored his advice and bought a superb mansion next to a lake to set up their first Municipal Restaurant.

For two years it prospered. Then they found that the manager was claiming for 32 wage packets, when there were only 30 people actually working on the premises.

In fury the Labour councillors immediately sacked him. And the following year it lost £10,000.

Issy was a font of wisdom. "Always understand the value of the Tumbler, he would say. It is the noble art of decoy. And honest deception is no crime".

When he knew that he had the rotten job of telling the Labour group of councillors that the council tax, or rates as it was called then, had to go up by 20%, he would list it as ITEM 2 on the Agenda. ITEM 1 would be to increase the admission charge for the ladies municipal toilets from a penny to a shilling, while the men's remained free.



The Artful Dodger shows Oliver, Nancy and Fagin how to do it

Women all over the country, led by Barbara Castle, were furious at having to pay anything at all in the sixties to go through a turnstile, which usually got jammed at a very urgent and crucial time.

All hell let loose. The suffragette demonstrations of 50 years before were back again.

Issy would then adjourn the meeting in uproar, saying "Enough already". Two days later he would humbly apologise, and announce that in future, ladies toilets would be free and refurbished too.

Then to loud acclaim he would introduce ITEM 2, and formally move the 20% council tax increase, and it would go through on the nod.

It was a perfect Tumbler. A distraction to pick pockets.

Where did the public purse get picked the most?

At the public hangings. On Tyburn Hill where the Marble Arch stands now, and where the convicted pickpockets would stand in a cart with the noose around their necks.

Just at the crucial moment when the cart was pulled away and the crowd gasped at the drop, the pickpockets in the crowd would make their dip.

All the rogues in the City were using Tumblers in the days of Charles Dickens.

Fagin didn't trust bankers. He happily kept his gold sovereigns in a tin box up the chimney and sang "You got to pick a pocket or two boys." He used Oliver, the Artful Dodger, Nancy, and Bullseye as his Tumblers.

The bank rogues of the 2008 property crash didn't make a bit, and leave a bit for you, they managed to lose the lot.

A Tumbler is a very useful political tactic too.

Chancellor Nigel Lawson knew it well in the eighties. He made large cuts in the Social Security Budget, increased gas and electricity charges, cut overseas aid, and brazenly announced that the one pound note would be abolished.

Instead it would be replaced by a bright brassy one pound coin instead; which every cartoonist in Fleet Street promptly nicknamed "Maggie's". It flooded Fleet Street for a week.

I told Nigel later what a classic Tumbler that was. He laughed loud and long, and said it was a word going back to the bread and circuses of Nero's reign in ancient Rome.

In the 66 years from 1926 to 1992 the Sheffield Labour party only lost control for one single year. It was in 1968. A year of the total revision of all local government boundaries with every single seat up for grabs.

It was also the year of Harold Wilson's pound in your pocket. Wages were frozen, council house rents doubled, overseas holidays cut to £50 and Enoch Powell became the Tumbler.

Labour lost every seat in Birmingham. In Liverpool the Conservatives won a majority of 50. In Leeds Labour lost 63 seats and Manchester lost 30. In Lambeth and Islington Labour was wiped out.

Sheffield went down too. But they also craftily laid a Tumbler.

Two months before the election, knowing they were on the Titanic, they boldly announced that in future all bus fares would be abolished, and every passenger could ride for free.

When even the stalwarts asked where the money was going to come from they simply said that if Labour were elected they would find the cash from somewhere, and if the Tories got in-well that was their problem. They would have to stop it or increase the rates to pay for it.

Either way the Tories would lose - and they did.

Twelve months later Labour was back in power, and it was another 28 years before they lost it again, when this time it was the Liberals who learned the art of the Tumbler, wiped out the Conservatives, and scraped in.

Today the Scots Nats., Welsh Nats. and every sweet talking politician on television has studied the art of the Tumbler right up to the biggest and most expensive election campaign in history, when the Republicans laid one against Barack Obama.

Her name was Sarah Palin. Smart, sassy, five kids, new and full of cheek, and she pulled in a large number of women's votes, without once mentioning the toilets.

Watch her in four years time and see how the Tumbler has taken over.

Joe Ashton



HELLO – I'M BORIS continued from front page

Boris accepted the invitation of our Executive Member Richard Tracey AM (which is how the members of the London Assembly call themselves) and who is one of his closest friends and longstanding colleagues.

Boris was born in June 1964 in New York. His family moved to London when he was five years old. Few Londoners have entirely English descent, and Boris is no exception. He describes himself as a "One man melting-pot", with French, Turks and

Germans among his ancestors.

From Camden Primary School Boris went to Eton College and later read Classics at Balliol College Oxford as a Brackenbury scholar. During his time at Oxford University he became President of the Oxford Union. He joined the *Daily Telegraph* in 1987 as leader and feature writer and from 1989 to 1994 he was the *Telegraphs'* European Community correspondent and then Assistant Editor. His association with *The Spectator* began as political columnist in 1994. He then became Editor of the paper and stayed in this role until December 2005. In 2001 he was elected MP for Henley on

Thames, when Michael Hessestine retired.

In July 2007 he retired from his position as Shadow Education Minister, to stand as Conservative candidate for Mayor of London. He then resigned as MP for Henley after becoming Mayor.

He is a passionate cyclist, enjoys painting, tennis and bringing up his four children with his wife Marina in North London.

So far he has not yet invited his old mates in for a drink, but we live in hope.

A WOMANS ROLE IN POLITICS

Elizabeth Peacock

I have always been an advocate of the need for women in public life and a great supporter of their achievements. However, it has to be realised that these achievements are gained at the expense of personal challenge and sacrifice.

The pressure of a marriage and of a family are of importance to both men and women with a political life, but the pressures seem even greater for a woman, particularly when babies and young children are involved.

A recent example of this is the return to the Cabinet Table of the French Justice Minister, Rachida Dati, within five days of giving birth by Caesarean section, normally requiring the mother to have at least five days in hospital.

Pressure of work, and the perceived need to demonstrate that women are the equal of men, is all very well, but totally misplaced in this example.

Rachida Dati has provided the wrong sort of role model for women in public life by the action she has taken. She has not helped the cause of women in family and public life - in fact she has done a disservice to both.

Some years ago when the High Commissioner for South Africa in London was speaking at a business women's dinner in the House of Commons she said 'Women will never be the equal of men until men start having the babies'. This impressive African lady, who started life in a very poor community, understood very well the needs of a family for a mother.

I fully understand the enthusiasm and drive of young women to get involved in public life and politics and at the same time pursue marriage and a family, but it is not always practical or sensible to try to do both at the same time.

Obviously there are good examples of young women who have successfully achieved this balance but there are not many and those that have done so have had to overcome great challenges.

I may be old fashioned but from experience I am of the view that bringing up a young family is a full time job and should be the first objective of a young mother. I recognise that it is possible to share this important role with a 'nanny', but not all families can afford this choice.

I also recognise the economic needs, for young mothers in particular, to get back to work as soon as possible after maternity leave, but I am of the view that our tax system should give better recognition of the woman who decides that she wants to concentrate fully on children and family life.



Where does this leave the women's role in politics?

In my view they have two clearly defined options!

Get involved early in their careers before marriage and children, but when these do arrive they should, even at the highest level, take sabbatical years to allow them to concentrate on the family.

Political parties and similar organizations need to be encouraged to ensure that a return to the public scene is possible later in life.

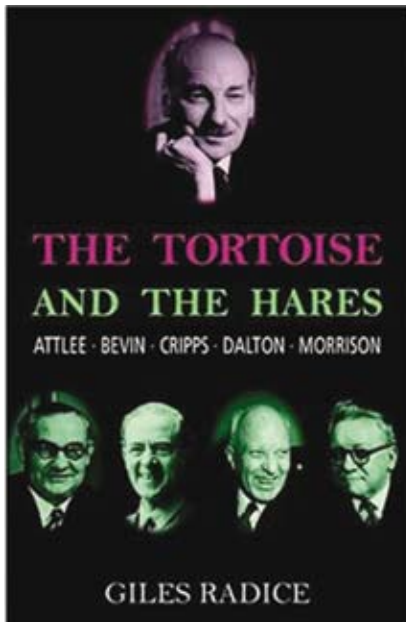
The more practical option is for women to concentrate on marriages and family early in life whilst at the same time taking an interest in politics and preparing to get actually involved when the domestic scene is under control.

After the 1983 General Election a national newspaper ran an article which asked the questions – "Why is the average age of the new intake of male MP's around 30 years and why is the average age of the new female MP's around 40 years?" The answer was quite simple – the female MP's had all spent time looking after their children before entering Parliament and had been elected at a time when the family was well established!!

This is the route that I followed which gave me 14 years in Westminster and is still giving me the opportunity to follow issues and causes some eleven years further on!

Miss Dati needs to rethink her priorities in life.

Elizabeth Peacock – is a Vice Chairman of the Association of Former Members. She was the MP for Batley, Yorkshire 1983 – 1997. A BBC General Advisory Council Member and former Member of the 1922 Executive Committee of Conservative MP's.



It is not often that a publisher's blurb describes a book with as much astonishing accuracy as the "Tortoise and the Hares", when it says "Radice brings to this seminal period of contemporary history, both the skills of a historian and the insights of a politician".

It is a study of the 1945 – 51 Governments when the Tortoise Prime Minister Clem Attlee led his four Cabinet Ministers Ernest Bevin, Stafford Cripps, Hugh Dalton and Herbert Morrison.

Ernie Bevin was the Foreign Secretary and a working class Trade Unionist who set up the Western Alliance.

Herbert Morrison a former Cockney Councillor had the talent to get the business through Parliament at a time when a guillotine of legislation was very rare and when Labour's awkward squad were a bigger nuisance than Churchill's opposition.

Sir Stafford Cripps, dour and a totally authoritarian son of a wealthy lawyer, was frugal, self disciplined and demanding ruthless punctuality from his staff.

And it was Dalton who wrote in his diary when Attlee was elected Labour leader in 1935 by its forty odd MPs, "A little mouse shall lead them".

Churchill said Attlee was "a modest man who had much to be modest about".

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARES

by Giles Radice

Politico's Publishing, 288pp, £25

In 1945 MP's led by Herbert Morrison tried to oust him and failed. In 1947 Cripps tried too without success.

But wily old Clem used the various factions in the party to divide and rule and the hares cancelled each other out.

Ernie Bevin was the largest of the four both in his physical stature, and politically too. He started work at fourteen as the son of a farm labourer and grew up in desperate poverty, yet he did a superb job as Foreign Secretary.

Herbert Morrison was the son of an alcoholic policeman; he also left school at fifteen. He ran the London County Council with an unfortunate gift of making instant enemies.

Dalton was an old Etonian closely connected to the Royal Family. He had health problems living on sleeping pills and suffering from boils, but he did nationalise the Bank of England. He must be turning in his grave now.

Cripps was rolling in money but he spent little, living solely on fruit and vegetables and died at the age of fifty two. Probably because he smoked like a chimney.

Churchill once remarked of him "There but for the grace of God, goes God".

But Attlee, described by one of his greatest admirers as, "Having all the presence of a gerbil and a sheep in sheep's clothing" nevertheless saw them all off, whilst seeming to be interested in nothing but cricket.

And it was Attlee himself who actually wrote his own epitaph in his retirement when he said:

*Few thought he was even a starter,
There were many who thought
themselves smarter,
But he ended PM, CH, and OM,
An Earl and a Knight of the Garter.*

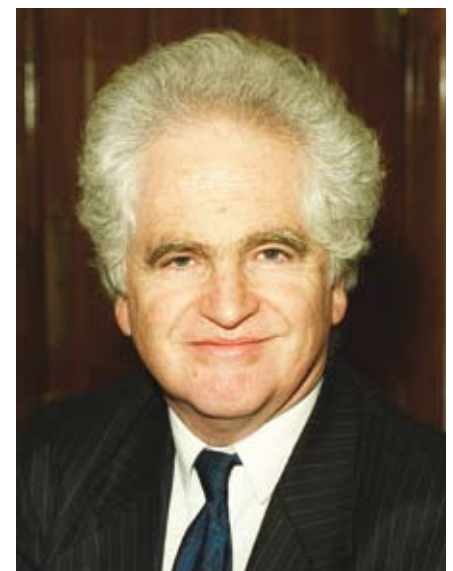
Lord Giles Radice has a superb talent in carefully mixing events and huge changes in history, with all the leading players blending seamlessly into the social changes.

He has an enviable track record in both Houses. He was the MP for Chester-le-Street for 28 years, before entering the Lords as a historian of talent, accuracy, and the fascinating personal details of the players on the greatest stage in London.

His previous books of biographies of Tony Crosland, Roy Jenkins and Denis Healey were hailed as the best political books of the year, while his twenty years of diaries from 1980 to 2001 was shortlisted for Channel Fours political BOOK OF THE YEAR.

It is not cheap at £25, but ask your local library to buy it as a must-have piece of history.

JA



Giles Radice

Photos from the Summer Reception 2008



Variety Certainly Adds Spice

by Denis Coe

Book Guild Publishing, 288pp, £12.50

Reviewed by Roy Roebuck.



What should a well-dressed MP wear? When Denis Coe was the Labour MP for Middleton and Prestwich

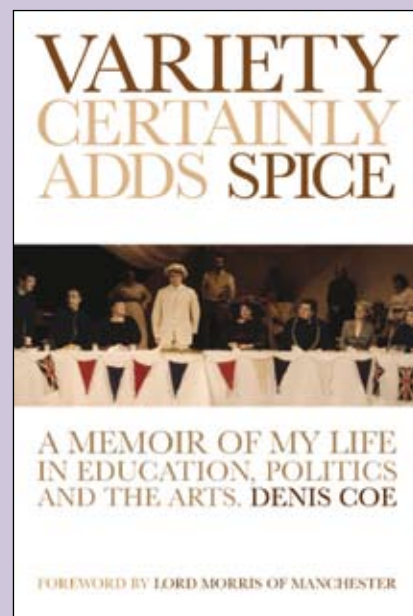
he was rebuked by his agent for his manner of dress. Dutifully, he bought a charcoal-grey overcoat, a Homburg hat and Guards-officer umbrella. Attired as the very model of an MP he went to the railway station to meet Arthur Davidson, the MP for Accrington, to share the journey to London.

On arriving at the station Denis was met by Arthur in a state of uncontrollable laughter. Denis responded haughtily to this mirth. Arthur apologetically explained that he, too had received complaints that he dressed too casually for an MP and had defended himself by referring to

Denis's smart casual wear, only for Denis to appear in his new outfit.

This is just one of the many amusing recollections of life as an MP in the 1966 Parliament, in Denis's memoir of the ups and downs of an interesting life. He was an RAF national serviceman, a Parliamentary candidate when Harold Wilson, the party leader was put on the wrong train, leaving the novice, nerve wracked Denis, to face a puzzled audience of 1,000, before Harold suddenly appeared, and dealt with rowdy students.

Spice and variety are here in plenty, including a choir boys' strike over pay, and the good old days of being a MP when not a penny was given in allowances for secretarial work or even postage. Denis promoted the measure which led to candidates' political parties being listed on ballot papers, and dealing with the bank manager after electoral defeat.



He became the Dean of a new university and helped found the British Youth Opera to give training opportunities for young singers and directors, and established a bureau for disabled students.

It's a record that makes one proud to have been a fellow MP.

Denis will be 80 this year. He has not been well lately. We wish him good health and thank him for his contribution to history.

Summer Reception 14th July 2009 6.30pm

Mr Speaker is again kindly hosting our Summer Reception in Speaker's House.

If you would like to attend please complete and return the application form below.

Numbers are limited to 100, and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. As usual members are welcome to



include their partners, but not guests, as this would be unfair on members of the Association in view of the limited number of places available.

We will notify anyone whose application is unsuccessful once the list is full. Otherwise, your invitation will be sent out from the Speaker's Office prior to the event.

APPLICATION FORM FOR SUMMER RECEPTION

I would like to attend the Reception in Speaker's House on the 14th July, 6.30pm

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

I would like to bring my partner:

NAME: _____

Please return this form to:

Sally Grocott, Association of Former MPs, House of Commons, Room G13, 1 Parliament Street, LONDON, SW1A 2NE

NB: Date of next All-Members' Meeting- THURSDAY 19TH MARCH AT 4PM IN ROOM 10

DRONFIELD BLATHER BLOG

(it is like Thursday night with Dimbleby)

Last summer in 'Order, Order' we told you about GOVNET who hold seminars for companies and their staff, who need guidance on how Parliament works for their Human Resources Departments.

We also reported how both Houses were introducing programmes about the work of Parliament in select committees, public bills etc.

The research showed that 67% of the public know little or nothing about our efforts.

We also wrote about the mountain of experience and knowledge our 340 members have ranging from Prime Ministers, to those who only served in one Parliament thirty years ago.

Yet every single one of them is an expert in at least one subject, which the public would like to discuss with a sitting MP, or an ex MP, and most of us would give up our time for free for a good discussion, or even a nostalgic argy bargy at a meeting with no holds barred.

So, please stand up and take a bow Mr. Harry Barnes.

Harry was the Labour MP for Derbyshire NE from 1987 to 2005. He was also a lecturer in politics at Sheffield University, Ruskin and Oxford.

He regularly organises a happy band of all ages, and all types, of students, retired lads from the pit, or the shop floor, onto a blog site called "Dronfield Blather".

Every month, on a Sunday evening, they hold their pints and halves to tackle the issues of the day.

Speakers are allowed fifteen minutes on a single item of their choice and then it is Question Time. Just like Thursday nights with Dimbleby on BBC One.

Harry asked Joe Ashton the Editor of "Order, Order" to not only stand in

for Dimbleby but to answer the questions too.

The 25 strong audience turned up on a bitter cold Sunday night to let the speaker tell them about our report of "LIFE AFTER LOSING AND LEAVING", and the stunning shock when 164 MPs got the sack on television inside two hours in 1987, and the trauma to their families.

"Oh Aye", said one guy about 55 years old. "What about the 1300 blokes who got made redundant at Nissan in Sunderland this morning. They won't get the pay off that you lads get".

Well, that is what old ex MP's are for. To answer awkward questions. Why not? If we can't put up a defence who can?

MP's do not get redundancy the speaker replied. They just get sacked when the public get fed up of them. And the job does not vanish. It is just like Nero with the thumbs down in the arena but on television. There is no unfair dismissal, there are no vacancies anywhere else either, or even a consoling pint with their mates who are scattered all over the country with no prospects of getting another job, because there is only one factory called Parliament.

It was a great evening, especially when like a true pro, Ashton, wriggled out of it by cracking some nudge, nudge, wink, wink, insider stories and jokes (and two Sundays afterwards, breathed a sigh of relief that certain Lords accused of taking cash for amendments didn't get revealed that morning).

Quite frankly while there is a demand for information about how the House works, it shows there is a far wider demand for the old time village hall "Question Time" arena.

Today's generation of MP's in all parties have sadly missed out on the lessons we learned; how to duck and dive or sway an audience, simply because local radio now holds its own phone in on "Praise or Grumble" from individual moaners instead of live audiences.

All our members really should try to set up something in their neighborhood and let us know about it.

There is a need to revive this face to face contact at the hustings which has sadly disappeared now in politics.

As Harry puts on his Blather Blog, "people left buzzing and continuing their own discussions in groups". Which is exactly what meetings are supposed to be about.

Harry Barnes was the Labour MP for Derbyshire North East 1987-2005.



OBITUARIES by Ted Graham



ANDREW ROWE

September 1935 to November 2008

Obituaries following the death of a colleague often vary, but the one which

appeared in The Guardian by Edward Pearce was spot on when he said of Andrew Rowe "A happy mixture of decency, principle and good sense, Rowe was unfashionable in a way that says much about the hard-edged era of Thatcherism and New Labour".

Andrew Rowe led a Commons career studied with deep involvement in the issues which impinged on the lives of his constituents. Entering the Commons in 1983 he was quickly faced with just about the biggest and potentially the most devastating of issues – the route of the Channel Tunnel.

Andrew led a march in Maidstone through his constituency of more than 6,000 protesters. It was not successful, but he was that kind of MP, always prodding and probing the established thinking on a range of issues

– especially social issues which affected not only his constituents but thousands more. He had gone to school at the highest level – Eton, and after going on to Oxford College he returned there as a Master before moving into Conservative politics. Through service in Central Office, he found favour from Margaret Thatcher who promoted him up the ladder of responsibility. At one time he was Director of Community Affairs at Central Office, being charged with Local Campaigning and establishing a bridgehead in the Trade Unions.

In 1983 when he entered The Commons he busied himself with many social issues, unusual then for a Tory, and often striking out against the expected party line. He objected to cuts in housing benefit and strongly objected to Kenneth Baker's policies for educational reforms, arguing that enabling schools to opt out of local authority control could lead to "a catastrophic fragmentation of society".

At Westminster he never achieved ministerial rank, yet he served on the lowest rung of the ladder as PPS to Edward Heath (for eight

years), then with Richard Needham and finally to Earl Ferrers. When he stood up in The Commons he was always fluent and even commanding, easy to listen to and his sincerity was utterly convincing, Not a persistent rebel, he nevertheless "stood up to be counted" against the party line on such issues as Devolution, Capital Punishment and Caning in Schools which gave him an unfair label as a "wet" and was not conducive to Mrs Thatcher's regime. When he decided to retire in 2001 it was because his seat had been reshaped into Faversham and Mid Kent.

He died from prostate cancer. For many years he had campaigned for better support and resources in the NHS to expand its research. His first marriage to Alison Boyd was blessed by a son, Nicholas, an actor who took the leading role as Sherlock Holmes in Stephen Spielberg's film "Young Sherlock Holmes" filmed at Eton College in 1985. He was also in Guy Ritchie's "Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" in 1988. Andrew later married Sheila who survives him with two stepdaughters.



COLIN PHIPPS

July 1934 to January 2009

Colin Phipps was a pioneer of Britain's Independent oil industry and a Labour MP for five

years from 1974 to 1979.

He was a jovial unflappable bloke who straddled the divide between politics and business, even to the extent of campaigning for Labour in his Rolls Royce before later helping to fund the SDP.

In March 1969 he fought a by-election at Walthamstowe, hoping to hold the seat for Labour, when the National Front broke up one of his meetings attacking Denis Healey and Arthur Bottomley, and flour bombing Colin and his wife Marion. Healey (a war veteran) challenged the rioters shouting "Come on you cowards! Lets hear what you have to say".

He sat out the 1970 General Election because he thought he had earned a winnable seat, but then in February 1974 he captured Dudley West for Labour with a majority of 4,669, then increased his majority the following October to 7,259.

Colin Phipps brought expertise and far ranging knowledge to the North Sea oil industry and fought strongly against devolution for Scotland emphasising it would be an extensive changing influence on the UK oil industry.

He thought that with his expertise, working for Shell all over the world, and founding his own company, Phipps Oil, which he sold to Texans in just three years, saying he had "made enough money for me to retire", he should have been on the front bench and he became very annoyed at not being made a Minister under Jim Callaghan's Government. He then rallied the back bench Labour opponents of devolution and led 30 rebels against the guillotine motion on the legislation, when the Labour government was in a minority of 17, and was one of seven Labour MPs to fight to the last against the Scottish Bill.

The Whips appointed him to the Court of Europe to sideline him, but he decided he could achieve more in the European Parliament, resigning his Parliamentary seat before the General Election. But when he tried for the European Parliament he failed to find a constituency.

He then became a very early advocate and founder member of the SDP urging Roy Jenkins and David Owens to go it alone rather than join the Liberals.

Phipps opposed the merger of the SDP and Liberals into the Social Democrats in 1988 after fighting Worcester for the SDP in 1983 and Stafford in 1987. He lost by 11,000 votes to Peter Walker and 14,000 to Bill Cash. It was then he ceased his political involvement.

Colin started elementary school at the age of 5 in 1939, then went to grammar school. He gained degrees in both Maths and Physics, a first class honours degree in Geology and then a PhD at Birmingham University.

Dr Colin Phipps became a consultant petroleum geologist of the highest standard, internationally known and a respected executive chair of many companies. He was a founder member of our Association and attended our events on many occasions. He leaves a wife Marion (affectionately known as Ninky) two sons Stephen and Ceri, and two daughters Helen and Anna.

THIRTY YEARS REUNION FOR OUR MEMBERS

On March 30 1979, the cliff hanging Labour Government was thrown out of office by a one vote defeat.

It was an historic night following the strikes and uproar of the Winter of Discontent.

It undoubtedly changed the whole fabric of British politics, ranging from the Devolution of Scotland and Wales, the legislation for clamping down trade unions, the controversial entry into Europe, Civil War in Northern Ireland and North Sea Oil ready to gush a bonanza for the next government, whoever that might be.

All depending on just one more single vote or even an abstention either from terminally ill MPs on their deathbeds or the very real threats of assassination by the IRA of two Irish MPs, Gerry Fitt and Frank McGuire, and their families, who promised to vote for the government.

Two days later the I.R.A. did murder Airene Neave, a long standing Conservative MP, when they blew up his car on the ramp of the car park. Peace in Ireland was another 20 years away.

The die was cast and the future written inside 8 minutes in both lobbies that evening. The Scots Nats Chief Whip Hamish Grey, voted against the government, then had a terrible pang of guilt and rushed out of the lobby in anguish and ran across to the other lobby to cancel his vote. But the door was slammed in his face. By seconds the government had lost the vote despite the heroic efforts of Labour's Deputy Chief Whip and Mr Fixit, Walter Harrison, the MP for Wakefield, now aged 88 and an enthusiastic member of our Association, although sadly unable to travel to London these days. The Scottish Nationalists lost nine of their 11 seats at the ensuing General Election.

Callaghan's gamble of marching through the winter like Napoleon had failed. It was two by-elections too far. He gambled on reaching a 40% devolution vote and when he didn't he was stuck in the Ides of March looking down the barrel of Mrs Thatcher's cannon.

She had waited a long time for her motion of No Confidence to succeed.

On **Wednesday 18th March**, former MPs of all parties who were in the Commons at that time, are invited to a reception in the River Room, House of Lords, from 6.00pm until 8.00pm, by kind permission of the Lord Speaker, Baroness Helene Hayman, to reminisce about those momentous events. Helene, who had just turned 30, lost her Welwyn and Hatfield seat on an 81% turnout at the General Election held on the 3rd May 1979.

It is a good chance for Association members to use their new pass and if we finish up in the Strangers Bar, it should be a memorable night for all.

Joe Ashton

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