



Pictures courtesy of our Executive Member Gwilym Jones.

YOUR VIEWS ARE NEEDED

by Eric Moonman

With a record number of MPs standing down at the General Election, our Association anticipates a large increase in our membership. A pilot study of facilities available to us and proposals regarding the future direction and strategy of the Association has been completed by Executive Committee member Eric Moonman.

A briefing paper was circulated by Eric to 15% of our membership who were invited to answer three questions:

- Would you be able to devote some time to talk outside bodies, subject to convenient arrangements on time and distance?
- Would you wish to be included in an availability list for the above?
- What ideas/proposals do you have to ensure greater awareness of the Association?

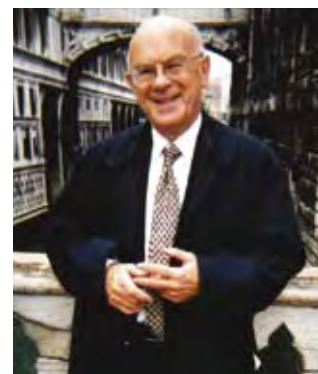
The results of the survey were positive and largely practical. 65% of those replying said they were willing to assist by building up outside contacts. Those unable to assist explained that they were no longer mobile and/or they had considerable other commitments. 69% said they were

agreeable to being included on a list as in b).

On the question of gaining greater awareness of the Association's objectives and aims, there were many helpful comments. It was felt that obtaining a security pass for all members was an excellent achievement which needed to be more widely advertised within the parliamentary establishment.

On a social level, several respondents said that it would be extremely useful and not unreasonable if a room could be set aside in the precincts for former MPs. Many ideas were put forward in relation to "Order, Order" and the setting up of a strategy group.

The full report can be seen on our website: www.epolitix.com/association-of-former-members-of-parliament. Any queries or suggestions should be forwarded to Professor Eric Moonman c/o the Association.



"You used to be Alf Bates"

Just after I lost my seat in 1979, I was walking through the centre of Ellesmere Port when a young lad on a small bike swerved to a halt in front of me. In awe, he looked at me and said: "Excuse me mister, you used to be Alf Bates."

I think I just smiled and said "Yes". Well, I suppose I did use to be.

He rode off with a big grin saying to himself: "Alf Bates". It was a most touching moment to realise that for him I was synonymous with being the local MP. Lots of letters of appreciation confirmed it, but a young boy who wouldn't be able to vote for another 10 years made it most poignant.

Why do we do it, knowing that so often it ends in tears?

I genuinely believe that we all - whatever Party - come in to politics to improve society and the lives of others, however much we may

disagree about how to go about it. Oh, a few people fall by the wayside and get duck ponds - but they are very few.

And even though we argue across the Chamber - and rightly so; we should be testing different ideas - outside we can be friends, knowing that we are all trying to do the democratic good. I can honestly say that in my time in the House I only ever had two personal rows - both with members of my own Party. One long gone, and one former disloyal Cabinet Minister who left the House so he could "spend more time on politics". Self aggrandisement comes to very few of us.

Outside of the Chamber, despite being fairly left-wing, I had many Conservative friends. Because we all believed in the purpose of the place. And that's how it is in the Association of Former MPs.

We don't have any political axe to grind. We just want Parliament and the political process to prosper.

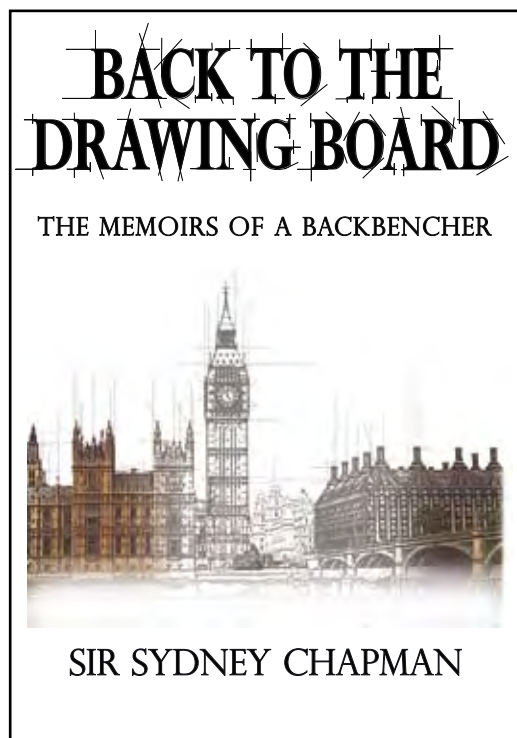
Across Europe, Former Members' Associations are treated seriously, and their ideas listened to as "think tanks". This Association should develop itself as that all-party think tank for the nation and use the talents that we all still have. I hope that our new intake after the General Election will help us do that.

We shouldn't ossify after we've retired - we should contribute.

If we do, then that young lad won't say "You used to be". Instead "You still can be".

Alf Bates was Member of Parliament for Bebington & Ellesmere Port 1974-79 and a Government whip 1976-79.





BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD THE MEMOIRS OF A BACKBENCHER

by Sir Sydney Chapman

250pp, £15

Sydney Chapman qualified as an architect at Manchester University and entered the world of politics when he became National Chairman of the Young Conservatives in the 1960s.



He won a seat at Birmingham Handsworth in 1970 and then returned to the Commons in 1979 as MP for Chipping Barnet until he retired at the last General Election. Sydney was a Government Whip from 1988 to 1995 which included the jobs of the Lord Commissioner of the Treasury and Vice Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household.

Lord Robin Corbett, the MP for Birmingham Erdington 1983 to 2001 has reviewed his book.

Few MPs ever found it difficult to answer the perennial question "Why did you go into politics?" There is a raft of responses.

Though not as Sydney Chapman found when the person asking the question was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher across a table in the Members' Dining Room.

Instead of perhaps a triumphal acclaim of praise to his great leader, Sydney reached even higher by saying "Many years ago I had a dream which I subsequently realised was a vision" he began. Most MPs would have stopped here and restarted. Not Sydney.

"The purple clouds parted and a voice from above intoned "Chatham, Chamberlain, Churchill, Chapman. But don't worry Prime Minister, I am in no hurry."

Our hero remembers "There was a distinct stiffening of breath and an eerie silence".

I know the look and response well. When I seconded the Loyal Address after the State Opening in 1978, I mentioned that my Hemel Hempstead constituency had been a major supplier of watercress in the early 1900s. It was meant to gather a giggle. Mrs. Thatcher was not the only one in the Chamber upon whom the passing pearl did not excite the expected amused reaction.

Sydney writes without pomposity, and avoids the tedious "Then I did this, going on to do that", about subjects which are no longer of interest and weren't that much at the time.

The memoirs are about his time in two constituencies. His first was Birmingham Handsworth, following Sir Edward Boyle. His next (for 25 years) was Chipping Barnet, following Sir Reginald Maudling.

It is a tribute to the shrewdness of

the then Government Chief Whip, David Waddington, that Sydney was invited to join the Whip's Office in 1970. Clearly taken aback he asked how long he had to decide. The no nonsense Waddington said, "I am going to our daily Whip's Meeting and I would like you to come with me." Sydney walked in alongside him.

Sydney's other role was to shadow his fellow Whip, David Lightbown, the twenty stone rough and tough but kind and gentle giant. It was a political Little and Large.

When Big David went marauding along the corridors, Sydney had to stop behind him after a recalcitrant Tory MP had been menaced. Ever the cheeky chappie, Sydney would chortle over his shoulder, "It's OK, I'm the community caring Whip!" He was what you might call a politician's politician.

OBITUARIES by Ted Graham



SIR ROBIN MAXWELL-HYSLOP
 June 1931 to January 2010
 MP for Tiverton

Many an MP would be satisfied to have served 32 years in

the Commons as Maxwell – Hyslop did from 1960 until 1992.

But Robin will be forever remembered for making his mark from the backbenches in that mysterious area of the Commons procedures, to such an effect that he earned the nickname of “Hybridity Hyslop”.

All parties have their awkward squad. A small number of backbench rebels who enjoy the sport of interrupting and delaying the business of the House.

Perhaps his most memorable triumph came when the Labour Government of 1976 was forced to withdraw its plans to nationalise the aircraft and shipbuilding industries after Robin argues with the Callaghan Front Bench that the bill was “hybrid” instead of the usual conventions.

Which is simple language meant trying to pass off a camel as a horse. Labour had a

majority of one which led to them singing the Red Flag when the result of the vote was announced and Michael Heseltine lifted the mace and started swinging it round his head to gain the everlasting nick name of “Tarzan”.

However, when the bill was defeated by the Lords later on (who demanded it should be reintroduced the next year), the government was forced to take out ship repair yards from the bill, because these yards had no engines or sails, neither could they float.

Not only had Robin made his mark in constitutional affairs but the time he had wasted affected many other aspects of delaying Jim Callaghan’s programme.

Robin was an independent MP and the House bible of Parliamentary Procedure “Erskine May” was his own bible of bedtime reading.

He earned the reputation as the finest procedural bore of his generation when he rose to table a wrecking amendment or question or intervention it would be plain to see that he knew more than anybody else

about the rules – including the government.

He was the most consistent rebel of his time. Over 32 years he defied his own constituency party line on more than 200 occasions, more than half of these were votes against a three line whip.

He voted against his Conservative Whip on 40 tonne lorries; water privatisation, the new Maplin airport, charges for dental and eye tests, Sunday trading, retail price maintenance, solicitors conveyancing charges, inadequate student grants, and plans for new arrangements with Argentina. The National Federation of Small Businesses elected him as Politician of the Year in 1989 for his devotion to their interests.

When Speaker Martin hosted a reception for our Association in 2008 Robin travelled up from Devon despite having serious health problems. We were delighted to see him looking so well and exchanged many happy memories of his “glory days”. He was knighted in 1992 and leaves his wife Joanna with whom they have two daughters.



JOHN MCWILLIAM
 May 1941 to November 2009
 MP for Blaydon

John McWilliam had the seat I would have loved to have had. I was

born and brought up on the Scotswood Road in Newcastle. A road which took you to Blaydon and which is forever commemorated in the Tyneside National Anthem, “The Blaydon Races”.

John represented Blaydon for twenty-six years and earned himself a place at Westminster as a man who took his responsibilities very seriously.

He was a telephone engineer by profession and Scotland, particularly Edinburgh, was his forcing ground. He was born in Falkirk and, in the late sixties, became a councillor in Edinburgh joining the young Turks there of

Robin Cook and George Foulkes.

John became the first and only Labour City Treasurer. He was always in the thick of the bitter battles throughout Scotland on such issues as comprehensive education. He had his first Parliamentary contest at Edinburgh Pentlands but was defeated by Malcolm Rifkind to eventually become successful at Blaydon in 1979.

John swiftly made a reputation for himself as a shrewd conscientious MP for that solid Labour constituency.

At Westminster he rose to become a long-standing member of the Speaker’s Panel, from which the Chairman of each Committee is chosen, and he earned the respect of members from all parties for the next twenty years.

John threw his hat in the ring when Betty

Boothroyd retired as Speaker but he did not fair well in the ballot, although he had served as the Deputy Shadow Leader of the House and also in the Whip’s Office.

He never lost his interest in technology and his experience in the post office gave him a particular insight into phone tapping procedures which was invaluable to the Members of the Defence Select Committee. He was a Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge at Westminster. His coffin at his funeral in Comrie in Scotland to where he had retired, was carried by his brethren.

Known to the press at Westminster as a very good companion in Annie’s Bar with his entertaining knowledge and wit he was married three times and is survived by his third wife Helena and two daughters from his first marriage to Lesley.

NEW MEMBERS

Our reception on the 1st February for those MPs who are leaving Parliament at the next election and would like to join the Association, was a great success.

These are some of the questions they asked us. So far over 140 sitting MPs are saying goodbye!

Q What does it cost?

A £25 per year

Q What do we get for it?

A Our magazine "Order Order" three times a year together with three copies of the House magazine plus several valuable and well earned privileges.

Q Such as?

A A very welcome pass to gain access to many parts of the House and to use certain bars and cafeterias including the Terrace, with limited access for families. Formal meals and food can be obtained on certain days in Portcullis House, including the Adjournment Restaurant.

There is also access to the Churchill Room at certain times and days.

Q Do we know any good places to stay on a visit to London?

A Yes. Excellent concessions are given to our members and their families by the Union Jack Club. It is just across the road from Waterloo Station. Families can stay overnight in the modern accommodation which has the best value of any Central London Hotel. Brochures for our members are available on request. This privilege and special rates do not apply to any non-members.

Q Can any ex-MP apply for a pass?

A Certainly. Telephone the Pass Office at No. 1 Cannon Row on 020 7219 5922 and make an appointment at Derby Gate (opposite the Red Lion pub) for a photograph identity pass. You will have to visit the office for this photograph but it will then be sent to you.

Q What about the shops and refreshment departments?

A You have the same access of any employee of the House to purchase Christmas cards, chocolates etc.

Q Is there any visual recognition or history of my service?

A Yes, Michael Martin arranged the production of a handsome signed certificate listing service which could be framed. We hope this can be re-introduced by our new Patron, John Bercow.

Q Does the Association have a regular modern office which can take calls or emails etc.?

A Of course. What is more we have our own executive officer too. She is Sally Grocott (wife of Lord Bruce Grocott, former PPS to Tony Blair). She is based at Room G13, 1 Parliament Street, House of Commons. Her telephone number is 020 7219 8207, e-mail grocotts@parliament.uk.

Unfortunately, Sally is only paid for one day a week on our business. She is a superb executive officer but we do not have facilities to swamp her with queries and requests unless they are specifically connected with the administration of our Association. Please do not abuse this access.

Q What opportunities are there for social gatherings with former colleagues?

A We hold three all-member meetings each year in a committee room of the House. Members often go for a drink afterwards in Strangers Bar, or for a meal in the cafeteria.

We hold, courtesy of our Patron, an annual summer reception in Speaker's House.

A "first" in November 2009 was a very successful reception at No 10, kindly hosted by Sarah Brown.

A number of members have arranged regional meetings.

Q Is the Association democratic?

A Yes. Our Rule Book is approved by the Speaker and the House of Commons Commission. Every word was carefully composed and accepted by them to provide a forum where former Members of Parliament can enhance the stature of politicians generally and seek to unite them in advancing the cause of parliamentary democracy across the world.

Our Association has to be impartial and independent and pursue any political purposes without being partisan.

We do not allow any lobbying of any kind and if our members are selected as a future candidate for any election they have to leave our Association.

Q Are there any elections at the AGM?

A Certainly. The AGM will be held after the General Election when candidates can apply in writing to nominate themselves for the ballot for the executive committee.

Seven executive committee members will be chosen by ballot and then six other candidates will be co-opted to carefully balance regions of the country, parties, gender and particular skills/experience.

It has taken many years to gain the acceptance and approval of the House which we now have mainly thanks to former Speaker Martin. Ours is a success story and we do hope you will join us after the conclusion to your Parliamentary career.

*Joe Ashton, Chairman
MP for Bassetlaw 1968 - 2001*

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open to all members of
the Association of Former
Members of Parliament



Buy an annual subscription for **only £97.50** (RRP £195)

To take up this exclusive offer,
please call Sarah Kinnane on **020 7091 7682**



Summer Reception 13th July 2010 at 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 150, 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 direct from the Speaker's Office in June.



APPLICATION FORM FOR SUMMER RECEPTION

I would like to attend the Reception in Speaker's House on the 13th July 2010 at 6.30pm

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____

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 18TH MARCH AT 4PM IN ROOM 10