

# Order! Order!

The Official Journal of the Association of Former Members of Parliament



SPRING 2022

## A TRAIN TO FREEDOM A DEATH TRAIN TO RIGA

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Andy McSmith writes:

### *Donetsk – the Welsh connection.*

Amid the terrible daily news from Ukraine, it is a fact of no importance, but curious, that the disputed town of Donetsk has not always been called by that name. For part of the last century, this city was named Stalino, in honour of You Know Who, and before that, it was Yuzovka.

Why is that interesting? On this page, you can read the contribution that the late Bob Hughes made to the anti-apartheid movement. But if this were a Russian publication, it would not be possible to transliterate his surname precisely into the Cyrillic alphabet, which has no equivalent to the letter 'H', let alone the silence 'gh', so the nearest phonetic equivalent would be the two letters IO and з, which, when transliterated back into the Latin alphabet, become Yu and z.

Vladimir Putin is eager to grab Donetsk because of its coal and steel industries, which were founded in 1869 by a businessman named John Hughes, from Merthyr Tydfil. The town was named Yuzovka, or 'Hughesovka' in his honour. Perhaps if it proves impossible to decide whether Donetsk is Ukrainian or Russian, they could make it part of Wales.

### *'I Hit Him Good'*

Also in the news recently, Evgeny Lebedev, owner of the *Standard* and *The Independent*, who was given these titles by his billionaire father, a former KGB officer. Appearing on a live chat show on Russian television in 2011, Alexander Lebedev took exception to a remark by another participant, stood up and punched him, so hard that his chair, which was on wheels, shot off the back

of the stage. *The Independent's* Editor felt obliged to report this incident, but played it down, to avoid embarrassing the proprietor, whereas the report and picture filled half a page of *The Times*. The next day, there came an indignant call from Lebedev senior. Why hadn't *The Independent* given him more space. "I hit him good!" he exclaimed proudly.

### *Address the prisoners!*

Gordon Prentice tells a story about how he was on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation to St Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean led by the late Peter Pike. The itinerary included a visit to the central prison that must have dated back to Napoleonic times, with walls six feet thick, and tiny cells for the condemned – though no-one had been executed there for years.

To get to them, the delegates had to follow the uniformed Prison Governor with a swagger stick in single file up steep stone steps with no bannisters. As their leader, Peter Pike was the first behind the Governor; Gordon Prentice was next. Down to their right, there was an open exercise area crammed full of bare-chested prisoners, gazing up at them.

Half way up, the Governor swivelled round and barked out at the top of his voice: "Mr Pike, Sir!!! Would you care to address the prisoners!"

There had been no warning that this was on the programme, but Peter Pike handled it with aplomb, yelling at the top of his voice: "The conditions here are terrible!"

He told them that the prison was overcrowded and totally out of date, and vowed to take up the issue as a priority back to London. And he did.



Peter Pike saying hello to the children at an elementary school in Kingstown

### *Farewell Sally*

The Association is in the process of appointing a new secretary, in place of the tireless Sally Grocott, to whom there are two tributes on the opposite page. Meanwhile, I can be contacted on [andy@andymcsmith.co.uk](mailto:andy@andymcsmith.co.uk).

## BOB HUGHES AND AFRICA

by Hugh Bayley



**Bob Hughes** chaired the UK Anti-Apartheid Movement from 1976 until it was wound up in 1995 after apartheid ended. He had gone to South Africa in his teens,

when his parents emigrated, and was appalled by what he saw. He returned to Scotland eight years later passionately opposed to colonialism and racism.

Nowadays it is hard to believe that any fair-minded person supported apartheid, but back then most people in Britain were either indifferent or actively supported the white minority regime and the short-term business benefits apartheid brought to British investors.

In 1971, soon after entering Parliament, he argued in the House that the UK should oppose South Africa's occupation of what is now Namibia, only to be slapped down by a Foreign Office Minister.

Bob defiantly supported the liberation movements, like Mandela's African National Congress, when other MPs called them "guerrillas" or "terrorists". He warned the pro-apartheid Parliamentary lobby that "support for the status quo in southern Africa is the greatest stimulus for revolution."

In 1976 Bob became chair of Anti-Apartheid. I was then a member of its executive committee, but we were then a small pressure group.

Bob knew that change in southern Africa would be led by liberation leaders from those countries, and Anti-Apartheid's role was to support them, but during his 20 years as chair Anti-Apartheid grew and became a household name – achieving a worldwide audience of 600 million for its Wembley Stadium concert to celebrate Mandela 70th birthday.

After liberation Bob kept campaigning. He became President of the Africa All-Party Parliamentary Group which played a key role in supporting Tony Blair's Commission for Africa, and chaired the post-apartheid solidarity group Action for Southern Africa.

In 2004 Bob was honoured as a Companion of South Africa's Order of Oliver Tambo.



## WITHOUT SALLY, WE WOULD NEVER HAVE SURVIVED

by Elizabeth Peacock

Chair, Association for Former MPs, 2015–2020

**The Association of Former Members of Parliament was a great step forward for those who served many years as a Member of Parliament.**

Years ago, colleagues who had worked all those years in the House of Commons suddenly found that when they returned to the House for a meeting they had to join the public queue to gain entrance to their former place of work.

From these dark days and with the help of Speaker Michael Martin a new organisation was formed – The Association of Former Members of Parliament, and eventually we gained a pass to the House which meant we did not have to queue to be allowed in.

However more importantly the Association gained the services of Sally Grocott, the wife of Bruce Grocott, a long-standing member of Parliament who had an office in one of the buildings which was part of the Parliamentary estate.

Sally was already very experienced in anything to do with the House and was immediately a great asset to the Association. Of course at that stage there were no funds to pay for any extra help that the Association might need.

It was some time later before the Association had access to any funds to pay for secretarial work and our Finance Chairman needed to make applications through various channels that may help in the situation!

So we were very fortunate indeed to have the services of such an experienced person who knew all the ‘ins and outs’ of the Palace of Westminster.

I have to say that without the help, knowledge and expertise that Sally brought into the Association we would just never have survived!

She was always there to take phone calls and answer questions from any member of the Association, and many others that could pick up the phone and ring to ask for help and assistance they might need at any one time.

I know only too well that when I was Chairman of the Association if I needed to have some ‘inside knowledge’ on the workings of the House I just had to ring Sally and if she could not answer my query she was not long before she would ring me back with the answer!

Without doubt Sally took us through many difficult situations that we as an Association and often as individuals could have not solved without her help and knowledge.

She will be greatly missed and I am sure that we can all join in sending her our very best wishes at this time!



## ...AND SHE NEVER MISSED A MEETING!

By Eric Martlew

Chair, Association of Former MPs



**For over 20 years Sally has been the Association’s presence in Westminster, during which time its reputation and influence has grown considerably.**

Sally has always been the point of contact, not only for members of the Association but journalists, academics and officers of the House who want to access the expertise of former members.

Over this time Sally has never missed a meeting of the Executive or the All Members meeting, a record of which she is justly proud.

Her initial involvement was as a volunteer, working with Joe Ashton who was instrumental in establishing the Association, but she became anchor over subsequent years. Working with over 400 former MPs must, on occasions, have been like herding cats!

I was recently asked by our editor, Andy McSmith, if there had been any incidents that would have been a disaster if it had not been for Sally sorting things out. My reply was, “probably, on several occasions, but we never knew as she didn’t tell us.”

During her time as Honorary Secretary Sally has worked well with four Chairs of the Association, all with different styles, but has never been afraid to tell them when she thought they were wrong, always offering good advice.

Let us not forget that she was an excellent editor of Order! Order! for a number of years, taking over from a former columnist of The Sun, Joe Ashton, and recently handing over to Andy McSmith, former Political Editor of the Independent on Sunday. She understood the importance of the publication and how much members appreciated receiving it.

The Former Members’ Association has gone from strength to strength by doing such things as helping to establish the Out Reach Trust and, in recent times, the Scottish Branch. Sally has contributed to these achievements in an immeasurable way of which she should be justly proud. Although she is retiring we hope to continue seeing her and Bruce in Westminster.

So on behalf of the Association and myself, thank you Sally for a job well done.

# THOSE SHIFTING VOTERS

Andy McSmith



**It is a startling statistic that for every voter who stayed the same way through the last decade there was another who shifted from party to party. Party loyalty is just not what it used. That message was brought to the December meeting of the Association of Former Members of Parliament by Robert Hayward, the former MP for Kingswood, now a Tory peer and pollster – just in case anyone had not already noticed.**

**W**hen we all started in politics, I think it's fair to say that the vast majority of people were either one thing or the other, and not many people shifted in between," he said. "But the research that has been done since 2010 shows that half the people that voted for whichever political party in 2010, by the time they reached 2019 had at some stage voted for a different political party. So, in under a decade, half the voting population had shifted."

He went on to describe research done by a fellow pollster, Peter Kellner, comparing voting patterns in 1987 and 2019, two elections the Tories won with a 12 per cent lead in each case. In 1987, the results were the same in the cities and in the so-called 'Red Wall' seats, with the Conservatives 20 per cent behind in both. By 2019, the gap had shrunk to three per cent in the 'Red Wall', but in the cities, it had widened to around 40.

Boris Johnson is credited with much of that shift to the Conservatives across the 'Red Wall', but at the time when Robert Hayward was speaking, the polls were narrowing, and the *Daily Mirror* was reporting that there had been a party in Downing Street during lockdown. Did that mean that Johnson should worry about being ousted by his own MPs?

Hayward replied: "The point at which he tips over, I don't know, and nobody does. I don't think he knows.

"Labour and Lib Dems are in exactly the same position in this country, with Boris, as the Democrats of New York and California were with Trump: they so detested the individual, they can't actually think about how to defeat them. That is the real problem: when you get a politician that is so Marmite."

Delving into the detail of one set of opinion poll results, he discovered that 14 per cent of the population said they liked Johnson because 'he is like me'.

"You have to ask yourself, which 14 per cent was that?" he said

This was the first time Association members had been able to meet since the start of the pandemic. By chance, the meeting, in the River Room of the House of Lords, was held the day – December 2 – when voters in Bexley and old Sidcup went to the polls to choose a successor to James Brokenshire, who died of cancer in October. Being what is sometimes called a Tory grandee, Lord Hayward had chaired the selection panel that chose the Tory candidate, and noted the Bexley Conservative Association's very clear wish of that it should be someone local. Labour also selected a local candidate.

*The general mood, Lord Hayward said, is "not antipathetic" – just "apathetic towards politics in general."*

With a few hours to go before polling closed, he forecast that the Tories would hold the seat, but predicted that the turnout might only be half what it was in 2019, which alone meant that the Tory majority would halved, at best. In fact, it fell from just under 19,000 to just under 4,500, on a turnout slightly worse than he forecast.

The Labour Party has, understandably, attached great significance to the 10 per cent swing against the Tories that they notched up in Bexley, but Lord Hayward's prognosis – given before the result was known – was that voters have not yet turned decisively against the Conservatives, who have been in power for 11 years now. When Labour had been in power for 11 years, in 2008, they were 15 or 16 per cent behind in the polls. These days, the main parties are "effectively neck and neck", with almost a third of the electorate undecided.

The general mood, Lord Hayward said, is "not antipathetic" – just "apathetic towards politics in general."



# THE 1922 COMMITTEE NOT QUITE THE CENTENARY YEAR

Peter Heaton-Jones

Rabbit in the headlights doesn't begin to cover it. It was my first day in Parliament after winning a seat at the 2015 general election. The party was on a high, having won an overall majority for the first time in 23 years. The atmosphere was hard to pin down; somewhere between freshers' week and cup final. There was so much to do, my head was spinning. And then the summons came.

**Y**ou've got the 22 at 5 in CR14', said my researcher. I thought he was watching Countdown.

The 1922 Committee is a kind of trade union movement for Conservative MPs who are not on the government payroll. Frankly its very existence would be of nil interest to anyone outside the Westminster bubble were it not for one vital fact: its members have the power to decide who becomes Prime Minister. And given the Conservatives' current leadership machinations, it's very much in the spotlight.

Let's deal straight away with every political geek's favourite factoid: despite its name, the 1922 Committee is not celebrating its hundredth birthday this year. Oh no! Its story begins, yes, in 1922, but not with the oft-quoted meeting at the Carlton Club where Tory MPs demanded withdrawal from Lloyd George's coalition government. Its true origins lie later, in the resounding Tory victory at the General Election that November. Bonar Law won a huge majority, which saw many Conservative MPs entering the Commons for the first time: 111 of them – almost a third of the entire parliamentary party – were total newbies.

Over the following months, as the euphoria of victory began to fade, this mass of virgin backbenchers started to feel lost, side-lined and under-valued. They were concerned that their voices were being drowned out on the bloated government benches and their views ignored by the all-powerful administra-

tion. The idea emerged of some kind of support group to help counter this *ennui*. A first meeting was held on April 18, 1923, followed by a second gathering five days later. There, a resolution was passed to form a committee of '...Conservative Private Members who were elected for the first time in 1922, for the purpose of mutual cooperation and assistance...'. The 1922 Committee, with its forever incongruous name, was born.

92 years later, I tried to squeeze through the doors of the committee room for that first meeting after the 2015 election. The echoes of history were obvious; a large number of us were first-time MPs, swept to Westminster on the blue tide that had seen our former coalition partners, the Lib Dems, reduced to a rump. The room was packed, noisy and sweaty. Everyone wanted to be there to see and cheer David Cameron, who had led us to our first outright victory in a generation. There were so many new faces that the Chairman had to ask everyone to look around and check if there were any interlopers from other parties. Or, worse still, the media.

The sheer numbers should have come as no surprise, since shortly after its formation, membership of the 22 has been open to all backbench Conservative MPs. There's not much opting-in or opting-out, although over the years there has been some shaking-it-all-about. In 2010, David Cameron engineered a rule change so that ministers could attend the Committee and be involved in its policy

*And so it is, 99 years on from its formation, that the 1922 Committee is still front and centre of the Tory Party's internal dramas*

discussions. The reason, it was said, was to ensure the voice of the Conservative parliamentary party wasn't diluted while we shared government with the Lib Dems. But some old hands were suspicious then, and remain so to this day. That's why the Committee jealously guards its right to summon ministers to appear before it, and only backbenchers can be on the ruling executive or go to certain meetings.

Of course, when it comes to leadership elections, the whole parliamentary party takes part. Technically the 1922 Committee merely organises the process rather than forming the electorate, but its Chairman plays a pivotal role. It is to Sir Graham Brady that 15 per cent of Conservative MPs – amounting currently to 54 – must submit letters of no confidence in their party leader to trigger a ballot.

And so it is, 99 years on from its formation, that the 1922 Committee is still front and centre of the Tory Party's internal dramas. And remember, despite the name, any centenary celebration now would be premature and superfluous. And unwelcome, since the government is probably keen to avoid any more events involving a birthday cake.

**Peter Heaton-Jones was Conservative MP for North Devon 2015–2019**

History collection 2016/Alamy Stock Photo



## THE DAYS OF THE 'CANARY GIRLS'

Eric Martlew

*Eric Martlew's mother, Molly, was maimed while working in a Second World War munitions factory. Now Eric is backing a campaign for a statue to the nation's 'forgotten heroines'.*

**D**uring both world wars dozens of munitions factories were built or commandeered around Britain. With most men of working age fighting abroad, more than a million women staffed the factories. They filled the bullets and shells that were vital to both Allied victories.

The toxic materials that made the explosives, including sulphur and cordite, were mixed in vats. The women were known as 'Canary Girls', because these chemicals turned their skin and hair yellow. They could also cause breathing problems and other health issues. Then there was the daily danger of death or injury. Sparks caused explosions that could kill dozens of people. The women were banned from taking anything metal into the building: no hairpins, no safety pins, and definitely no matches. But accidents still happened. My mother, Molly, suffered one of them.

Molly was from Wigan. In 1940, aged 30 and with five children, she went to work at the Royal Ordnance Factory at Euxton, near Chorley in Lancashire, which is in the constituency of Mr Speaker. It employed up to 35,000 people. I suspect that her main reason for going there was the money: it was a lot better than could be earned in other factories or the mills.

My father, George, used to drive the train from Wigan to the private station

at the munitions factory, but my mother would never get on the train he drove because she said he would crash it!

In the summer of 1941, Molly was putting detonators into bombs. They called it tickling them in. If you didn't get it quite right, there would be an explosion. That day, one did blow up. It took my mother's right thumb and two fingers off. She was right-handed. When they took her to the medical centre they said, "You're pregnant." She said, "I know. But if I'd told you, you'd have stopped me working."

Fortunately, there was an eminent surgeon working close by. He saved the rest of her hand and redesigned it so she could still use it. She then went off and had my brother, Les, who turned 80 last November. That is how I know that this happened in the summer of 1941.

My mother got £600 compensation, which was a lot of money during the war. She wanted to buy a house with it. My father didn't. They spent some of it sending my second-oldest brother, Dennis, to grammar school. He'd passed the exam, but before the 1944 Education Act, they had to pay. My eldest brother, Ronnie, had also passed the exam, but there was no money to send him then, so he missed out.

My mother said the rest of the money was spent buying things on the black market, which got the family through the war.

*The women were known as 'Canary Girls', because these chemicals turned their skin and hair yellow*

I started to think about my mother's story again last year when I heard Sandra Gold-Wood being interviewed on BBC Radio Cumbria. Sandra, who lives in Cumbria, is campaigning for a statue at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, to commemorate the women who worked in Britain's munitions factories during both world wars. Sandra calls them the wars' forgotten heroines.

The Arboretum is a centre of Remembrance, with nearly 400 memorials to those who served in wars around the world. It includes a statue to the Women's Land Army and the Women's Timber Corps. The Land Army boosted Britain's food production during the Second World War. They tended to be middle class. The Timber Corps tackled a shortage of timber. And there wasn't much chance of getting your hand blown off working in the fields or in forestry. But the mainly working-class Canary Girls, who risked their lives every day, don't have a statue at the Arboretum. I have met Sandra and am supporting her campaign, which needs to raise about £150,000.

My mother couldn't go back to the munitions factory, so went to work at the Heinz factory just outside Wigan. She had two more children: a girl who was stillborn and, in 1949, me.

In 1952 my father was transferred to Carlisle by British Railways and became one of the top drivers on the West Coast Mainline, occasionally driving the Royal Family. Decades later, as MP for Carlisle, I successfully campaigned for the £9 billion upgrade of the WCML.

When Molly came to Carlisle she got a job as a machinist at the Metal Box factory. There was a system then called a Green Card: companies had to employ a percentage of disabled workers. They gave her certain jobs she could do.

She was always conscious of her disability. Very often, if you see a picture of her, she would have gloves on. It must have bothered her, but she never let it show. I remember once she was taking me for a walk and I was holding her hand. And I said, "I don't want your funny hand..."

My father died when I was 17. Driving steam trains wasn't good for your health – and the Senior Service didn't help. It was rough when he died. A lot of the family had left home. I was the only

one working. My mother had stopped working to look after my father, but she got her job back afterwards. She was a grafter. And her family meant everything.

Women of her generation and upbringing didn't expect a lot. They left school, they went to work in the cotton mills in Wigan, they got married, they had children and they brought up their family. She wanted more than that for her children. We all did reasonably well.

In March 1987, I was selected as the Labour candidate for Carlisle. My mother was very ill. The family were called to the Cumberland Infirmary, because the doctors didn't think she'd survive, but she said, "I'll get out of here, because you need my vote." I had inherited a majority of only 71 from Ron Lewis, who'd been Labour MP for Carlisle since the 1960s. It was the most marginal Labour seat in the country. Within three days, she was out of hospital.

By the time of the election in June, she was back in the Infirmary. At the count I borrowed a mobile phone, which were very rare in those days, and phoned my mother to tell her I'd won, by 900 votes. "Is that all?" she said.

She died in August, aged 77. Months later a nurse who had looked after her

in her final days stopped me. She said, "I was talking to your mother after you were elected and she said to me, 'I wish our Eric would get a proper job'."

My mother never really talked about the war. People of that generation didn't. My mother and my grandmother would watch the Service of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall. My grandmother lost her husband in the First World War, my mother lost her father. But it wasn't talked about. It was a very different culture then.

In a way, my mother was just an ordinary woman. It was an ordinary story, but a special story. You think of the deprivation and the hardship, and the things that she and her colleagues did. I suppose they had to: it was the war. Their work was secret. They weren't allowed to talk about it.

The Canary Girls' story has become forgotten history. But my mother deserves a statue. They all do.

*For more information about the statue campaign, and to make a donation, please visit [canary-girls.com](http://canary-girls.com).*

**Eric Martlew was MP for Carlisle, 1987–2010**



## NEWS FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OUTREACH TRUST

An update from the Chair, John Austin

**THE TRUST IS VERY PLEASED** and honoured to announce that The Speaker, Rt Hon Sir Lindsey Hoyle MP has agreed to be a Patron of the Trust.

Towards the end of last year we had active engagement with a number of universities. There were three online sessions at Exeter, with Bridget Prentice on "Delegated Legislation/Regulatory Reform and Electoral processes"; Helen Jones on "Scrutiny & role of Select Committees and effectiveness of Parliamentary Questions, Early Day Motions, Petitions and Private Members Bills"; Rt Hon Sir David Hanson and Edwina Currie on the "Role of Whips and relations with backbenchers". There was a hybrid session at Brunel University with Tom Levitt on "Reflections on the parliamentary process" and an online event at Westminster University with Helen Jones on "The Blair/Brown years".

Following this recent successful programme, I am pleased to report that Exeter, Leeds and Brunel Universities have confirmed that they wish to use our services in 2022 and we are expecting a positive response from Westminster. We are also in discussions with Swansea, Lancaster, and London SouthBank Universities.

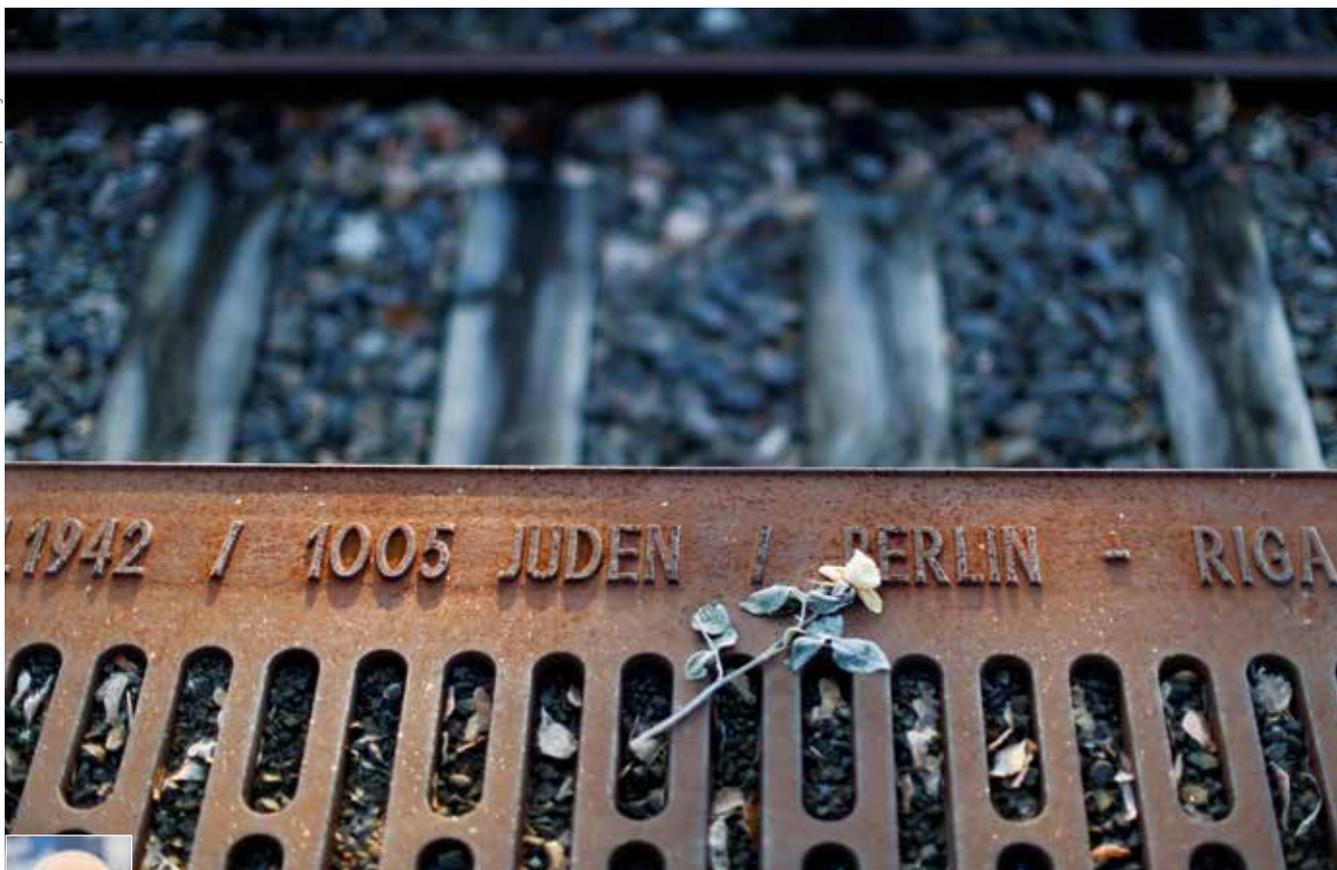
There is also good news from Scotland. Douglas Alexander put us in touch with the School of Social and Political Science at Edinburgh University who have indicated that their Parliamentary Studies class may wish to work with us. We are also working with the Edinburgh Political Union,

the official student body of the Department of Politics & International Relations and have drawn up a programme of events – both in-person and virtual – with the following speakers: 3 March (in-person) Rt Hon Sir Vince Cable "The UK's Constitutional Future" 8 March (in-person) Gordon Banks "Being a Shadow Minister" 9 March (online) Rt Hon Sir David Lidington "How powerful is Parliament really?" 14 March (online) Rt Hon Sir David Hanson "Being a Government Minister" 4 April (online) Dr Edmund Marshall "Electoral Reform"

We have another 6 members interested in working with Edinburgh and a further programme is under discussion, including a session on the working of the European Parliament where one of our former MEPs, Julie Ward has agreed to speak.

**We are always pleased to welcome new volunteers but would also be grateful if members could share any university contacts they may have. Please email me at [admin@parlyoutreach.org.uk](mailto:admin@parlyoutreach.org.uk)**





## A TALE OF TWO TRAINS

Peter Bradley

LONG AGO, in January 2005, I wrote an article for a local newspaper – the monthly column to which MPs attach surpassing significance, but no-one else reads. Except this piece was not the routine account of a momentous week in Westminster and heroic endeavours in the constituency. This one was written to mark Holocaust Memorial Day and it was deeply personal. And fully 17 years later, those 750 words have become a book of 100,000.

My father had died some six months earlier, on 10 May 2004, the 65th anniversary of his flight from Nazi Germany after five terrible months in Buchenwald. He had rarely spoken of those times and barely touched on them in the brief family history he wrote towards the end of his life. But to it, he had appended a copy of the letter he had sent his parents shortly after his arrival in London. It was that letter, written on a park bench on Hampstead Heath, that inspired my article.

In stilted schoolboy English, he recounts “of what kind my deepest impressions were in the first few days I spent in this country”: he extols the courtesy and honesty of the English and

the helpful geniality of their police; he marvels that women smoke in public and wear bathing suits in the parks, and that men push prams, carry bags and fly kites; and, of course, everyone talks about the weather. He reassures his parents, a little naively, that it’s so easy to strike up conversation with fellow passengers on the bus that, “when you come here, you will soon learn this language”.

But, in his heart, he knew they would not come. He had said his last goodbye as he boarded the train for the Channel coast at Frankfurt South station in May 1939. The train his parents took in November 1941 carried them to the camps in Latvia.

And it was that image, of the two trains – one heading west to freedom, the other east to destruction – that haunted me for the best part of a decade, and, in the end, drove me to spend seven years researching and writing my book.

Initially I had had a very limited plan, to follow the route of the transport which bore 1,000 Bavarian Jews from Nuremberg to Riga – a fate which only 52 survived. I can’t explain why I felt the need to make that journey. It simply insinuated itself, at first subtly, but then

*...it was that image, of the two trains – one heading west to freedom, the other east to destruction – that haunted me...*

with growing insistence. Finally, I felt I had no choice.

Had I been able to identify the precise path of Sonderzug Da 35, I may have made my symbolic pilgrimage and left it at that. But no reliable record could be found and, in any event, the rail tracks have long been uprooted from large spans of eastern Poland, Lithuania and Latvia through which the ‘special train’ will have passed.

That was not the end of it though, for my failed attempt to find the answer to a single, discrete question prompted a multitude more about the fate of my grandparents. I wanted to know what had happened to them during the Nazi years. Above all, I needed to understand why it happened, how their fellow citizens – their neighbours, their business acquaintances, the customers at their draper’s shop, the people they knew – had come to put them on that train.

My quest led me from family papers to archives and libraries, from scholarly works to the testimony of survivors. It led me to the beautiful city of Bamberg in which my father had grown up and which, despite everything, he loved so well for the rest of his life; it led me to Buchenwald and to Riga.

At the heart of the narrative I came to write is the story of my family as it threads emblematically through a broader and longer history – from its confinement in the Frankfurt ghetto in the late 1400s to the sporadic successes and the regular reversals of the next 300 years, to my great grandfathers' new-found freedoms and prosperity in the nineteenth century, to the obliteration of their hopes and of their children and grandchildren in the twentieth.

And, perhaps inevitably, as I wrote, the scope of my book widened. I began the first draft against what was, for me as for others, an extremely unsettling backdrop. The UK had just voted to leave the EU and Donald Trump had won the US Presidential election. Across Europe and elsewhere, populists were enflaming ancient or imagining new grievances as they bid for votes, while authoritarian leaders in power unpicked the constitutions of once stable democracies. We had entered a time of turbulence, uncertainty and unreason in which simple solutions to complex problems appear so alluring to so many. For the first time in my life, I felt that the world may not be the safe place I had always taken it to be.

So, one question led to another – about how societies come to reject liberal values, and about the origins and persistence of the misbeliefs which permeate our shared European culture.

### Failings and Virtues

My father's experience reveals the best of Britain, but also its worst. He was eternally grateful for the sanctuary it afforded him. He respected its

institutions and cherished its democratic values. He was very happy to become a British citizen and to raise his family in a free society.

But he had been one of the very few Jewish refugees allowed here in the 1930s. Of the 500,000 who, in the gravest danger, applied for entry visas, only 70,000 were admitted. Though we take justifiable pride in the Kindertransport which saved some 10,000 Jewish children, we should also acknowledge that we kept their parents out. Very few lived to see their sons and daughters again. Like my grandparents, they were held in a trap from which no-one would free them. This was not the first time that this country had turned its face against the desperate victims of persecution and conflict; it has not been the last.

And my father had not exactly been welcomed here. His visa was temporary and, barred from working, he subsisted on handouts from Jewish charities. When war broke out, his attempts to enlist were rejected because of his 'suspect background' and, when the Nazis invaded the Low Countries in May 1940, he was arrested as an 'enemy alien' and shipped across the Atlantic to a Canadian internment camp. It took two long years before the authorities learned to distinguish between the Jewish and political refugees and the committed Nazis and German POWs with whom they were imprisoned. Then, at last, my father was released and recruited.

As others have argued in different contexts, it is important that we re-examine our assumptions about our history and character. We need to understand our failings as well as our virtues, because the choices we make about our future depend to a significant extent on what we think we know about our past.

### Jews and Gentiles

In the course of my research, I came

across another, little-known history, of how the Danes, though under Nazi occupation from 1940, saved almost all their Jewish fellow citizens from deportation and death by

*My father's experience reveals the best of Britain, but also its worst.*

spiriting them across the Öresund to neutral Sweden. They made a choice, different to that of the Germans who supported or succumbed to Nazism, different to that of the collaborators who abetted their destruction of European Jewry. The Danes made their choice, acted on it and were prepared to face the consequences, because, collectively, they decided that it was the right thing to do.

My book is not simply about the past, nor solely about Jews and Gentiles. For there is one more question: in a letter to a cousin shortly after the war, my father asked, "if Hitler had persecuted only Gypsies, how many of us would have stuck our necks out to show kindness to them?"

If we're honest, that question is unanswerable. But it's also inescapable. As my book concludes, the past shapes but does not determine the future: "in the events of our own times, we are all perpetrators, or bystanders, or victims or resisters, or perhaps more than one at once. The question is: which of those roles do we choose for ourselves?"

### The Last Word

My book fulfilled another, more personal purpose. It's not by chance that in recent years a new literary genre has developed. Many of my generation, the sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors, brought up in safe havens and largely ignorant of the trauma their parents endured, have felt the need to ask the questions they could not put to them when they were living. It is as if there is an absence which must be acknowledged, an emptiness which must be filled.

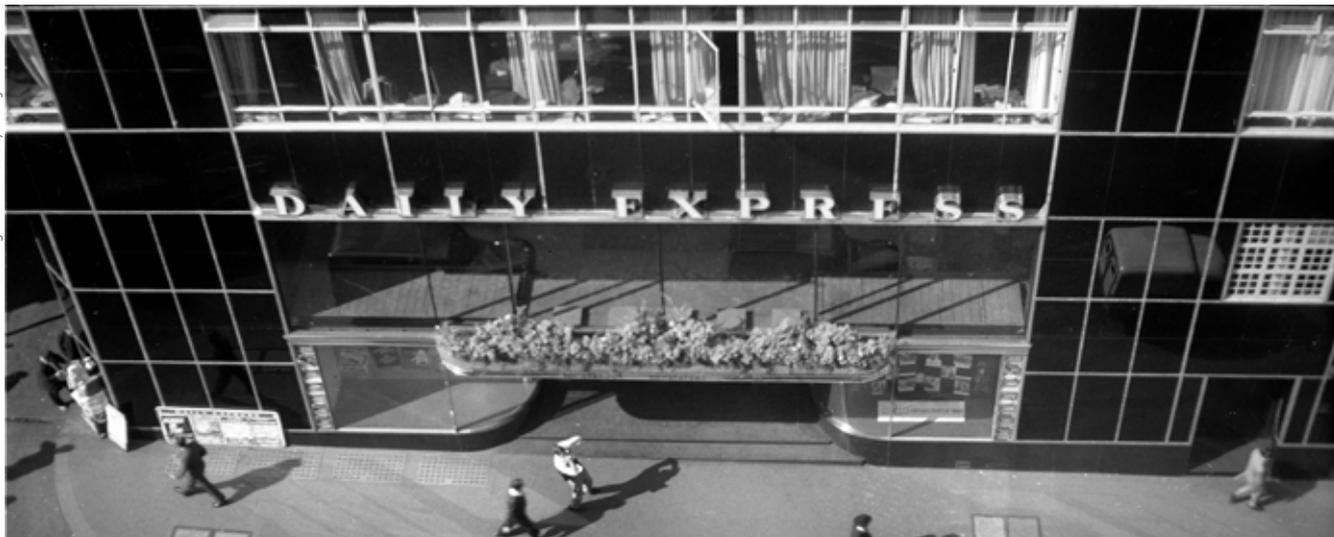
In telling my grandparents' story, I wanted somehow to make their abbreviated lives more significant, to reclaim for them their individuality and the humanity that had been stolen from them. I wanted them, through me, to have the last word.

*The Last Train – A Family History of the Final Solution* is published by HarperNorth on 12 May.

Peter Bradley for MP for Wrekin, 1997–2005



The Brandes Family



## MEMORIES OF FLEET STREET

John Cockcroft

**For me the Fleet Street of the 60s and early 70s was an Elysium. There was wit, intellect, history, good humour and at times an unhealthy amount of alcohol.**

I had read economics at Cambridge University and then went on to work for Nigel Lawson in the features department of the *Financial Times*. After a spell in the economics department of GKN I was Economics Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1967–74.

Particularly fond memories centre around the RAF chapel at the Strand End, the King and Keys pub next to *The Telegraph*, the Cheshire Cheese Pub. The Wig and Pen, which fluctuated between being a club and a pub, was owned by the Venetian embassy for centuries.

In a broader historical context, on Restoration Day in May 1660 King Charles, flanked by his two brothers, rode down Fleet Street to Temple Bar, to receive the keys to the city. The Venetian ambassador dispensed red wine to the watching crowd.

Three centuries on, in October 1940, Ed McBarrow, NBC Reporter, stood on the roof of the *Daily Express*, looked up Ludgate Hill and reported the heroic efforts of the London Fire Brigade to save St Pauls. President Roosevelt was suitably impressed.

Among the people I knew and liked in my Fleet Street days were Maurice Green, Editor of *The Telegraph* and Colin Welch. They alternated in presiding over the leader writers' conference at 3.45pm each day.

I was asked in June 1969 to write 1,050 word leader about the condition of Britain. The Editor thought my article was too right-wing and his deputy thought it was too left-wing. We were summoned to see Lord Hartwell, proprietor, to resolve the problem.

Another remarkable person on the newspaper was Peter Utley, a pioneering Euro Sceptic. We were good friends and had tea in his office most working days for seven years. He had an uncanny habit of saying 'very nice to see you' and 'don't you think my secretary was glamorous'!

The London press club across the road from *The Telegraph* met at St Bride's church, the meeting place for many Fleet St people and their guests. I gave many lunches in the large dining room there. I particularly enjoyed the good wines and conversation at El Vinos.

*It's a mixed story but most of my Fleet Street memories are happy ones.*

One of the more notable figures at Fleet St was Ronnie Payne, a redoubtable Yorkshireman and son of a vicar who held forth many days on matters of current interest at El Vinos. There was a major dispute there in the 1960s about whether or not women should be allowed to order drinks at the bar. In the end Anna Coutts, deputy editor of the *New Statesman*, triumphed by standing at the bar until she almost had to be forcibly removed.

The background to all this is that the rigid roles within printing units kept productivity very low. Some of them would inherit a particular job from their father. There was also a serious over-manning in the newsrooms of the national newspapers which meant that the wages were low.

The move of the papers out of Fleet St to Docklands after 1986 was necessary and overdue. Credit must be given to Rupert Murdoch for bravely arranging for his newspapers to move. *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* were the first to move; other newspapers followed in quick succession. By moving the newspapers, management eradicated some restrictive practices – there may have been five men doing a particular job on setting the print for an article.

*The Daily Telegraph* was financially saved by the Canadian, Conrad Black. There were many job losses when the papers moved, mainly among the printers. The unions strongly objected but there was little they could do to stop the move.

I went to see Ivan Fallon, deputy editor of *The Sunday Times*, in 1970, in a taxi. I had to lie on the floor as the premises were being picketed by union members, who were throwing rotten eggs etc at people arriving at the new site.

It's a mixed story but most of my Fleet Street memories are happy ones.

**John Cockcroft was Conservative MP for Nantwich, 1974–1979**



Brian Iddon presenting all six volumes to the Mayor of Bolton, Councillor Linda Thomas, and her consort Len

## AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF BOLTON'S LABOUR MPS

Brian Iddon

**Brian Iddon, the former MP for the Bolton, South East, has spent more than six years researching all 23 of the Labour MPs who represented seats in or near Bolton, including Farnworth and Westhoughton, between 1906 and 2015. The outcome is a series of six books entitled *Bolton's Labour Members of Parliament*.**

The six books weigh in at 1,650 pages altogether. Dr Iddon presented a set to the Mayor of Bolton, Cllr Linda Thomas, so that they can be made available to read in the History Centre at Bolton Central Library.

From 1832 to 1950, Bolton County Borough was a two-member constituency. From 1906 onwards, the borough was served by six Labour MPs in all. The first was Alfred Gill, who died in 1914. Then there was Robert Tootill, Albert Law, Michael Brothers, Jack Jones and John Lewis. Their lives are all covered in **Volume 1** of the series, along with Thomas Greenall, Guy Rowson, George Tomlinson, Ernest Thornton and John Roper the MPs who represented the Farnworth County Borough Constituency from 1922 until 1983, when the Constituency was divided up mainly between the newly created constituencies of Worsley and Bolton, South East.

In 1950, Bolton Borough constituency was split into Bolton East, which was abolished in 1983, and Bolton West. At first, they both had Labour MPs, respectively John Lewis and Albert Booth, both of whom were unseated in 1951, to be retaken, lost and retaken again by Labour. **Volume 2** covers the Labour MPs for Bolton East – Alfred Booth, Bob Howarth and David Young – plus Brian Iddon himself, who succeeded David Young as MP for Bolton, South East, which came into existence in 1983.

**Volume 3** covers two of the Labour MPs who represented the Westhoughton Constituency – Tyson Wilson and Rhys Davies, who served 45 years between them.

**Volume 4** covers the two other Labour MPs who represented the Westhoughton Constituency – Thomas Price and Roger Stott – before the constituency was abolished in 1983, and the Labour MPs who represented the new Bolton West Parliamentary Constituency until 2015 – Gordon Oakes, Ann Taylor, Ruth Kelly and Julie Hilling.

**Volumes 5 and 6** contain chapters that explain what each of these 23 MPs contributed collectively to each of main policy

areas – Changes to the Constitution, Procedures of Parliament and Home Rule for Ireland, Foreign Affairs and the EEC/EU, Health, Social Security, Education and Training (**Volume 5**) and

Britain's Defence, Conscientious Objection and Pacifism, Trade and Industry, Science and Technology, Local Government, Housing and Planning, Transport, Culture, Media and Sport and Agriculture, and Food and Rural Affairs (**Volume 6**).

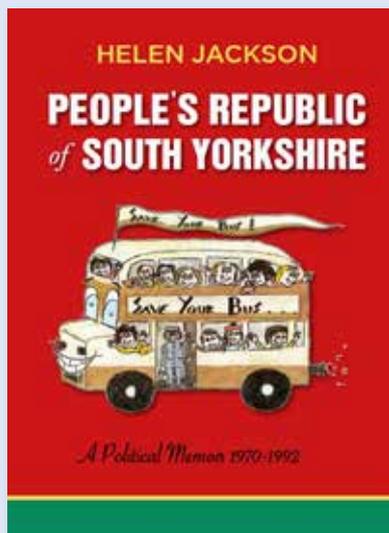
These books cover over a century of Britain's (and Bolton's) history and describe the social and political reforms that were hard fought for by successive Labour Members of Parliament. They describe too how the 23 MPs came to power in Westminster, many of them from humble beginnings, and what they each achieved. One was a key negotiator when the UN Nations Charter was agreed in San Francisco and was a pioneer of legislation for disabled people. Three were Cabinet Members. Two were aides to Prime Ministers, two were granted peerages, one of them exploded gunpowder in the Houses of Parliament, one of them defected to the 'gang of four' when the Social Democrat Party (SDP) was launched, and one, who met Christine Keeler in a London nightclub, was involved in leaking the 'Profumo Affair' to Labour MP George Wigg.

Brian Iddon is keen to know whether any of their relatives are still living in Bolton today (few of these 23 MPs were actually born in Bolton) and invites those who are to contact him. His details are Dr Brian Iddon, 3 Avoncliff Close, Bolton, BL1 8BD; Tel: 07710 464325; e-mail: iddonb@hotmail.co.uk.

He is now considering how to make his archive more widely available. Digital copies have been deposited in the House of Commons Library and in the History Centre at Bolton Central Library.

**Brian Iddon was Labour MP for Bolton South East, 1997–2010**

# A GOOD READ



## COURAGE CALLS

Linda Gilroy

*The People's Republic of South Yorkshire*  
By Helen Jackson

Published by Spokesman Books

ELECTED TO THE COUNCIL in 1980 Helen charts in her book how, through chairing two key committees, she learned about what could bring transformational change to people's lives. Patiently she insisted that those who made and implemented public service policy listen to the voices of those on the receiving end, at a time when that was not so commonly or easily done. This approach was a happy fit with the council leadership of David Blunkett and the local Labour Group as they sought to respond to the growing challenges affecting their industrial and mining communities.

Collecting, measuring and publication of data were key to ensuring that policy achieved positive outcomes. Adult Education, the role of the Northern College Spring Bank camps and the WEA, were allies in ensuring people grew in confidence to express their views and become part of achieving the change they wanted to see. Their experience was deployed on everything from shaping better bus services and bus fares, to bringing new jobs to life, the design of homes and the maintenance of lifts. Pay audits became the basis for positive action to tackle the entrenched discrimination holding people back as a result of poverty, gender, race, or disability.

Helen's determination to see wider, more equal opportunities for women at work and in family and community life shines through as she tells of how she worked to achieve this with like-minded others in Sheffield; experience that she later drew on when, as PPS to Northern Ireland Secretary of State Mo Mowlam, she helped to ensure that the women of Northern Ireland were given a voice in the peace process.

*...her book should appeal to anyone interested in the history of English local government.*

Jackson enriches her own recollections with those of others who were active front of stage and behind the scenes, during a period when change in England's regions and cities was beginning to accelerate. What was it like to be a Labour councillor bent on doing your best to help people and communities to survive and thrive in those years? In the context of rate capping and the threat of being surcharged some unlikely local partnerships were forged to help face down the worst impacts of these policies on public services. Jackson describes how, despite the acute difficulties of this background local politicians helped people who lived in Sheffield and South Yorkshire shape their future.

All of this is told in Helen's characteristically calm, self-effacing, matter of fact way, with the eye and ear of a trained historian. As a result, her book should appeal to anyone interested in the history of English local government. The recipes evolved by Sheffield people and politicians, David Blunkett, Clive Betts and Richard Caborn, as well as Helen, came to have a lasting influence on its development. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies was founded in 1986 with significant input from Sheffield and other northern cities and Jackson was one of its early Chairs. It continues to influence the agenda to this day.

Helen the politician is not content with setting out history or simply recording a memoir. Ever practical, her book concludes with a final chapter, The Way Forward, drawing themes and lessons from what worked well to deliver change through local democracy, and what did not. A decade of austerity, the Covid pandemic and climate change make the value of learning ever more urgent. She points to how much can be achieved when the power of global movements is effectively harnessed to those with the commitment to work with their local communities in Britain and beyond. This final chapter finishes with the echo of Fawcett's hundred-year-old clarion call, still yet Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere.

In the face of ever deepening cynicism about the capacity of politicians to change lives for the better, and about their integrity, this book is above all a refreshing reminder that a different politics is possible. A tonic much needed in these troubled times!

This review is adapted from one published in *The Spokesman Magazine* 150 January 2022

## THE SCANDALOUS SECRETS OF DOLPHIN SQUARE

Jerry Hayes

### *Scandal at Dolphin Square: A Notorious History*

By Simon Danczuk and Daniel Smith

Published by The History Press

ONCE I WAS A RESIDENT OF DOLPHIN SQUARE. It was not a happy experience. The building could have been built by Stalin. It was overheated and down at heel. I left and thought nothing more about it until I read Simon Danczuk and Daniel Smith's jaw droppingly gripping book. If only I had known that the place was a cess pit of scandal, spies and salacious gossip I might have stayed a little longer.

What makes this book such an enjoyable read are not just the weird vignettes of the great and not so good who lived in these monstrous barracks, but the strange, rather British eccentricity which seems to permeate the fabric of the place. During the war the underground car park was used as an air raid shelter. It was divided into three parts. Those who snored. Those who didn't. And those who kept pets.

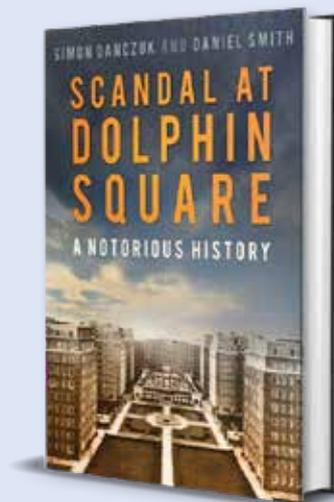
There was also a campaign by a publication called *The Bare Facts* to allow part of the gardens to be reserved for nudists. In the middle of the Blitz. That'll show 'em.

One of my favourite Dolphinites was Marguerite Antonia Radcliffe Hall. She had rather masculine features, dressed in tweeds and lived with an older woman. She also sported a monocle. Miss Hall was an author. Her most notorious offering was a novel about lesbianism, *The Well of Loneliness*, which didn't go down well with that great bastion of journalism, the *Sunday Express*. "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of Prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body but moral poison kills the soul". In 1974 it was featured by the BBC as a Book at Bedtime.

That ghastly fashionable fascist pair, the Mosleys, when not kowtowing to Hitler or stirring up hatred for the Jews, infested the place for a while. Lady Antonia Fraser, the daughter of Lord Longford, once witnessed her father being beaten up by fascist thugs while Mosley admiringly looked on. She never forgave him. One evening she spied him at a party in the Square and avoided him like the plague, until he approached her.

'I am so sorry we didn't talk. As your father said to me at lunch today ....we were having lunch at the Ritz'. It was rather touching that Longford, who so publicly preached mercy and forgiveness, had long ago made peace with the bogeyman of her infancy.

I would love to have been a fly on the wall when Bud Flanagan of the Crazy gang gave acting lessons to Harold Macmillan. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they had, hands on each other shoulders and dressed in floppy hats and fur coats, sung *Underneath the Arches*? But in Dolphin Square anything was possible. For example, Lord Victor Hervey, dubbed by the *Daily Mail*, 'The Satanic Marquess', used to fly his helicopter either drunk or drugged and sometimes



*That ghastly fashionable fascist pair, the Mosleys, when not kowtowing to Hitler or stirring up hatred for the Jews, infested the place for a while.*

both. One passenger said he was fine until he nodded off.

The sadly missed journalist, Simon Hoggart, recalls his first meeting with 'charming old drunk' Dolphinite, Sir Spencer Le Marchant in Annie's Bar. When asked what he would like to drink Simon asked for a pint. And a pint is what he got. Of Claret. In a tankard. Dear old Spencer had a way, as a whip, to get the boys on side. According to Michael



Brown MP, after some minor act of rebellion, he was invited to his flat, where he tried to seduce him. It was a good incentive to toe the party line.

One of my favourite stories was of an argument over who owned the transmitter used by the pirate station, Radio City, which broadcasted from an old sea fort. Retired Major, Oliver Smedley, of Radio Caroline, believed it was theirs, and arranged for a group of men to liberate it. This didn't please Radio City's boss, who visited Smedley at his Essex Cottage, where Smedley shot him dead. He was acquitted of his manslaughter. Dear Oliver was my friend and neighbour for many years. A great character and eccentric.

I remember often popping into to the Dolphin Square Brasserie for a drink before bed. According to the book this was a place where young women targeted MPs for sex. I can't say that I noticed. Honest. Nor did I see or hear the two resident singers, les Freres Perverts.

This is a roller coaster read of the scandalous, the squalid, the outrageous and the eccentric. Are we surprised that many of its residents were MPs?

Jerry Hayes was MP for Harlow, 1983–1997

## TRIBUTES

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### BOB HUGHES

3 January 1932–7 January 2022

Labour MP for Aberdeen North, 1970–1997

*Remembered by Malcolm Savidge*



IT WAS A PRIVILEGE to have Bob Hughes as my local MP, friend and political mentor long before I succeeded him as MP for Aberdeen North.

Bob was born in Fife, but the family moved to the Woodside district of Aberdeen, and then, when Bob was in his early teens, to South Africa. What he saw there gave him

a revulsion against colonialism, racism and apartheid, which shaped his political convictions. On a lighter note, it also made him appreciate Tom Sharpe's savage, bawdy satires on the South African police *Riotous Assembly*, and *Indecent Exposure*.

Returning to Aberdeen, Bob got actively involved in Labour and trade union politics, won a respectable second place in solidly Tory North Angus and Mearns at the 1959 General Election, and was an Aberdeen City Councillor from 1962 to 1970.

In 1970, he was selected to fight Aberdeen North. Bob and his election agent would joke that he was chosen in order to use up excess "Vote Hughes" posters left by the retiring MP, Hector Hughes. Elected with a majority of nearly 18,000, he became an opposition spokesman, and a Minister in the Scottish Office after the 1974 election – but resigned the following year over public spending cuts.

Bob returned to the front-bench in 1981, and was in the Shadow Cabinet from 1985 to 1988, as Shadow Secretary of State for Transport. Like many Labour MPs of that time, he was denied a position in the Cabinet by the party's long period in the wilderness, but as his resignation in 1975 reflected, Bob was more interested in principles than positions.

Hugh Bayley has provided a tribute to Bob's Anti-Apartheid work. There is general agreement that his diplomacy, inclusivity and drive helped to transform the movement.

In 1993, Glasgow – the first of several British councils to confer the Freedom of the City on Nelson Mandela – hosted an event in City Chambers, where a delegation from each Council conferred the honour on Mandela, in person, in separate ceremonies. Bob went to the City Chambers on the day, but the red-coated Town Sergeant seemed to regard him as a gate-crasher. He allowed Bob to wait in the Lord Provost's rooms, provided he left before Mandela arrived. Bob did not leave, and was vindicated when Mandela spotted him and rushed across the room to embrace his friend and leading supporter

Bob sought the candidacy for the new constituency of Aberdeen Central before the 1997 election, but lost by the narrowest of margins, and accepted a working peerage, as Lord Hughes of Woodside.

He had married Margaret in 1957, who died just months before him. They are survived by three daughters and two sons.

### PETER PIKE

26 June 1937–27 December 2021

Labour MP for Burnley, 1983–2005

*Remembered by Gordon Prentice*



MY GOOD FRIEND Peter Pike died in December after being unwell for some time. He was 84. He retired from the Commons in 2005 – but not from politics.

I first got to know him in 1991 when I was selected to fight Pendle, next door to his Burnley constituency. I looked on him then as a kind of big brother – the long-

established and worldly-wise MP and me the new kid on the block.

Although I've now lived in Canada for over a decade, I kept in touch with Peter over the years and last heard from him in October in the wake of the terrible news of the murder of David Amess.

Peter was a genuine person with no side to him. He got on well with people and I never once heard him unfairly criticise anyone. His maiden speech, on 28 June 1983, marked him out as a man ready and willing to defend the interests of Burnley to the last.

Peter was incredibly industrious. His constituency casework

was a top priority and the day-to-day experience of helping people with all their issues informed his politics.

I recall him standing up in the Commons, often slightly dishevelled, holding forth on the scourge of low pay or on the problems facing manufacturing or local transport or whatever the issue was. If a policy affected Burnley you could count on him to be on his feet, defending the town and its people.

He was a Labour stalwart to the core. He believed Britain needed a strong, united Labour Party. He told me he was never the greatest Tony Blair fan but it was always a pity that Gordon Brown and Tony Blair did not work better together. He said Brown's obsession with wanting to be Leader was his weakness.

Peter remained politically active when he left the Commons, chairing the local constituency Party until 2015 when he said he wanted to hand over to a younger person with more energy.

He liked the bustle of Westminster but the place changed when Covid struck. He told me: "Parliament is very strange now as it is almost empty – it would not be my cup of tea at all. That said I still miss it!"

I have many vivid memories of Peter. He was a good friend. I shall always remember him with great affection.

**JIM LESTER**

23 May 1932–30 October 2021

Conservative MP for Beeston, February 1974–1983; Broxtowe, 1983–1997

*Remembered by Ken Clarke*

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED JIM around the time when I became an MP, in 1970. He was a very active, very good county councillor. Unusually, he and his father were both county councillors, but Arthur Lester, who ran a family business, was Labour, and Jim was Conservative. They were both actually very centrist politicians.

Jim and I were good friends who socialised regularly. He was a relaxed, easy person to get on with. I cannot see how he ever made any enemies. I always described myself as a 'wet', but Jim was more 'wet'. He was as 'One Nation' a Tory as you could get, part of that centre that is currently rather politically homeless.

On the day when the Callaghan government fell, defeated by one vote, Jim Lester and I decided to go to Ronnie Scott's. The world was full of politicians trying to say statesmanlike things about this historic event, and certain sections of the press were amused – not in harmful way – by what Lester and Clarke thought of doing to celebrate.

He became a junior employment minister in 1979, but was very disappointed to lose his job in a reshuffle in 1981. I think he thought he was going to have a long and interesting ministerial career beyond, and he was very hurt. I remember anxious conver-

sations with Jim, who was asking me 'Why?'

At the time I could not answer his question as to why his ministerial career had been cut off so soon, but with hindsight, I think it was because of tensions between Margaret Thatcher and Jim Prior, the Secretary of State for Employment. Prior was much more left-wing than Margaret. He had taken on trade union reform, but on a basis which he described as 'softly, softly'. My guess is that Jim Lester strongly agreed with Jim Prior, while Margaret was determined to go much further, and, losing patience, sacked Jim Lester as a warning shot to Jim Prior.

He never came back into office, but he was an effective backbench MP and very popular in the House and in his constituency, next to mine.

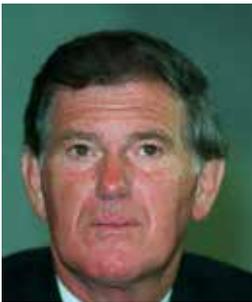
After he left the Commons, we used to get together once or twice a year for lunch, but as Jim got older, he found it more difficult to get to London. In his last few years, he went to live in a cottage in Norfolk, near where his son, Simon, was the gamekeeper on a large estate. It was an odd set up. Although they were happily married, Merry, his wife, lived in Eastbourne, which Jim said was a dreadful place. Then his son moved to a bigger estate, in Scotland, and eventually Jim decided that he could stand Eastbourne, and spent his last few years there, with Merry.

Jim was one of my very best friends and I will remember him fondly.

**RONNIE FEARN**

6 February 1931–24 January 2022

Liberal Democrat MP for Southport, 1987–1992 &amp; 1997–2001

*Remembered by Michael Meadowcroft*

RONNIE FEARN was a very different kind of MP in an unusual constituency. In the early 1950s the Conservatives held 51 of the 60 Southport town council seats, and four of the nominally nine opposition members were elderly, somewhat complaisant aldermen. In 1950 a solitary Labour councillor was elected and in 1952 a charismatic

Liberal GP won another ward, helped by the absence of a Labour candidate. In the next ten years Liberal and Labour candidate rarely fought each other. This coalition gained control of the council in 1962.

In early 1961 I opened a letter at the local Liberal headquarters from one Ronnie Fearn, a bank clerk, wanting to join the party and suggesting that he be the candidate in a ward near to his home, which, he observed, had not been contested by a Liberal for some years. It had to be delicately pointed out to him that this was a ward that was left to Labour to target. However, the following year, 1962, he fought and won his local ward, which he then held for fifty-two years!

He was a well-known personality in Southport, being involved in a number of local voluntary groups and particularly being responsible for writing, producing and acting in the local Church group's annual pantomime which played to full houses

at the local Arts Centre theatre. His unintentionally camp style was particularly suited to his regular role as the dame, though with typical self-mockery he switched to playing the baddie while he was the town's MP.

In 1970, when the prospective Liberal candidate withdrew at the last minute, the party turned to Fearn and, despite the disastrous national result for the party, he increased the Liberal vote. He fought the next three general elections but in 1983 the local Liberals voted to select a candidate with a more rigorous political identity – who also failed to win. Then, remarkably, having secured the nomination again in 1987, Fearn won – the only Liberal gain in England.

Against the trend, he was defeated in 1992, when Southport electors voted Conservative to keep Neil Kinnock out of 10 Downing Street. Undaunted, Fearn stood again in 1997, his seventh contest, and was re-elected. He retired in 2001 and was made a life peer.

John Pugh, his successor as Liberal Democrat MP for Southport said, "He was by no means a typical politician and if there is a book written about how to become an MP or a lord, Ronnie never read it." He was the epitome of the local MP with an obvious awareness of the character of the town and he retained a real affinity with its residents.

He is survived by his wife, Joyce, a daughter, Susan, a son, Martin and five grandchildren.



# LEAVING PARLIAMENT

John Austin

From time to time, the Association hears distressing stories about the experience of former MPs after they leave Parliament.

I am one of those fortunate former MPs who left the House at a time of my choosing, at the age of 65, after 18 years in the House, but it was after careful consideration of all the pros and cons and discussion with my family. Several colleagues who decided to retire or to take up new or resume earlier careers also feel they made the right decision. Others were less prepared for life outside Parliament and those younger Members who found it very difficult to get back into employment had a very different experience.

Most of the distressing stories came from those who had not left voluntarily but had been defeated at the polls

The Association's Executive thought that more could be done to support MPs leaving Parliament and asked me to draft a report. I am grateful to Victoria Borwick and Andrew Bingham who looked over my initial draft and added comments and suggestions. The final report was approved by the Executive and Victoria, Adrian and I, together with our Chair, Eric Martlew, met recently with the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, to discuss the Report.

## We raised two issues:

1. What advice and assistance might be offered to MPs leaving voluntarily, either for retirement, personal reasons or career change;
2. What ongoing advice and support should be offered to members facing the trauma and disruption of suddenly losing their seat?

Sir Lindsay made no commitments but sounded sympathetic and agreed to consult with House officials and to meet us again. We agreed to circulate the Report to all members of the Association for further comments before meeting the Speaker again. All members should have now received a copy.

The Speaker agrees with us that the political parties themselves have an obligation to support their members who have lost their seats. As any improvements to services arising from our Report will be of direct benefit to currently sitting MPs, I will be writing to the Parliamentary Parties.

Getting the sack or being declared redundant is painful for anyone in any occupation but there is perhaps nothing as painful as the personal rejection by one's constituents which can cause deep psychological trauma. Gone are the days when ex-MPs could easily walk into another job, or public appointment or seat on a board. The expenses issue clearly damaged the reputation of MPs and lowered the esteem in which they are held by the general public, including employers, and recent political events have probably reduced the reputation and standing of MPs even further.

Unfortunately, the distaste caused by the misdemeanours of a minority is visited upon us all and this has adversely affected those ex-MPs seeking employment. Nor is it as easy as in the past to return to former professions due to the pace of change. In some cases, professional qualifications might need to be updated or validation to practice might have expired. We are not aware of any system in place for sitting members to keep their professional skills up to date or their licence to practice valid?

There is an increasing general awareness of mental health issues and we acknowledge that the House now provides some services which did not exist when many of us were MPs. Whilst acknowledging the importance of support services of this nature for sitting MPs we are limiting our recommendations to services specifically linked to retirement from the House, whether voluntary or involuntary.

We believe the House of Commons has a duty of care as a quasi-employer and that there is a role for the House of Commons Commission and/or IPSA to provide counselling, training, mentoring and support services for sitting Members choosing to retire and, after an Election for those losing their seats. All MPs currently contribute to the House of Commons Members Fund but it is restricted in what it can do and its terms of reference were drawn up in a different era when parliamentary pensions did not exist. There is a case for reviewing the terms of reference of the HCMF which MPs themselves pay for.

**I hope members will welcome my Report and we are still open to receive comments and suggestions which should be sent to me at [johnaustin1944@gmail.com](mailto:johnaustin1944@gmail.com) by the end of March.**

## ASSOCIATION CONTACT DETAILS

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