

Biography and archive sources

David Dutton uses a previously neglected collection of papers to trace the life and political career of the Liberal MP Sir Walter Runciman (1847–1937)

Sir Walter Runciman and the Runci



Sir Walter Runciman,
1st Baron Runciman
(1847–1937)

THE EMERGENCE of a hitherto neglected collection of private papers relating to a Liberal politician active in the first decades of the twentieth century is a matter of some note. In the case of Sir Walter Runciman, first Baron Runciman of Shoreston, however, it is not just the papers but the man himself who has so far been overlooked. Chris Cook's generally comprehensive and invaluable two-volume work, *Sources in British Political History 1900–1951: A Guide to the Private Papers of Members of Parliament*, not only failed to trace any papers relating to Runciman, but even omitted to list his name among those who sat in the House of Commons in this period.¹ At one level, this omission is scarcely surprising. Sir Walter's political career was not one of particular distinction. References to him are easily confused with those to his more famous son of the same name.² Furthermore, Runciman senior served as an MP for only four years and he never took part in a contested parliamentary election. There is no record that he spoke in the Commons chamber during his

time as an MP. Runciman was elevated to a barony in 1933, but he was by then in his late eighties and was not active in the affairs of the upper house during the remaining four years of his life.

The Times obituary of the historian, Steven Runciman, offered a succinct summary of his grandfather's career. He was 'a Geordie of Scots descent who ran away to sea at 11, was a master mariner by 21 and founded a shipping line'.³ If nothing else, this brief précis captures the extraordinary rise of a man who was born in Dunbar, East Lothian, in July 1847. The family soon moved to a very ordinary eighteenth-century stone cottage, provided by the Coast Guard service, in the fishing village of Cresswell, in Northumberland. As he later recalled, it was from this dwelling that, after one aborted attempt to escape the family's poverty, the young Runciman 'set out alone about 3 o'clock one dark December morning to follow my destiny, which led me through many adventures on sea and land. ... I gently opened the door and slipped out, made my way to the beach, and

Runciman Papers at Elshields Tower

commenced my journey to the nearest seaport.⁴ His formal education ended at this point, leaving him 'a mere human splinter, with no better prospects than the opulence of poverty while I graduated in the forecandle into sailor manhood haunted all the time with infantile notions of reaching the dignity of the quarterdeck'.⁵

Beginning as a humble cabin boy, Runciman rose steadily through the merchant marine and, for twenty-six years, 'with very small respite between the voyages ... sailed as boy and man, winter and summer, in hot climates and cold, in small sailing vessels, in a handsome clipper, and finally in steamships'.⁶ In the autumn of 1884, however, he was advised on medical grounds to live ashore and he retired from active sea service. The following year he started in business as a shipowner in South Shields, purchasing as his first vessel, at scrap-metal prices, an old steamer that had been laid up for three years during a period of depression in the industry. His commercial acumen was immediately apparent and in 1889 the South Shields Shipping Company (soon renamed the Moor Line) was set up with capital of £150,000. By the time of the First World War, Runciman's firm owned forty steamers and he personally was a multi-millionaire and the owner of a 300-year-old mansion, Shoreston Hall. It was a success story which he found it difficult to explain, often reverting in his correspondence to notions of 'destiny' and divine providence. 'I have built', he reflected, 'out of nothing to begin with but the faculty of observing and inventing a very large and successful business in a short time, while men who have had office training have not been so successful. Therefore my system must be as good as other people's at any rate.'⁷ But Runciman would not have been able to pen a manual of good business practice: 'I generally act upon a sort of instinct which I cannot explain and which can only be acquired by getting to understand the workings of the world generally.'⁸ At all events, he never took his wealth for granted and remained financially cautious throughout his long life. 'Even now', he wrote in 1928, 'the struggle I had in early life haunts me like a ghost and makes me avoid risks.'⁹

Once settled in South Shields, Runciman began to make his mark in public life. In particular, as a Wesleyan Methodist and lay preacher, he became conspicuously involved in the temperance movement, in which his wife, Ann Margaret, was already active. But until the South African war, in which, perhaps surprisingly, he found himself on

the Liberal Party's imperialist wing, Runciman took only a 'newspaper interest' in party politics.¹⁰ Opposition to Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign brought a more active engagement. Chamberlain was a 'puller to pieces not a Constructor and the country will do well to get rid of him'.¹¹ Succeeding Samuel Storey as chairman of the Northern Liberal Federation, Runciman campaigned vigorously for Liberal candidates in Northumberland and Durham in the general election of 1906, at one point considering standing himself in Tynemouth. By this stage, however, his chief political interest lay in the furtherance by any means in his power of his son's political career. His own ambition was apparently 'satisfied' by the conferment of a baronetcy in 1906, showing that it was 'possible for a poor sailor lad to make much of his opportunities'.¹²

Walter Runciman junior had first been elected to the House of Commons for the two-member seat of Oldham in a by-election in 1899.¹³ Narrowly losing his seat in the Khaki Election of 1900 to the Tory, Winston Churchill, he returned to parliament as MP for Dewsbury in 1902, holding the seat until 1918. At the formation of Campbell-Bannerman's government in December 1905, he immediately secured appointment to junior office and reached cabinet rank as president of the Board of Education in 1908. The elder Runciman's path to parliament was somewhat more bizarre. The seat of The Hartlepoons, largely industrial and Nonconformist, might have appeared an ideal constituency for him. But, at the start of the twentieth century, it was firmly in the hands of Christopher Furness, himself the head of a shipping firm. Indeed, so apparently secure was Furness's grip that in 1909 *The Times* equated any attempt to dislodge him with 'fighting the Pope in Rome'.¹⁴ Following the first general election of 1910, however, Furness was unseated for electoral malpractice, having transported a number of miners to the polls, an action judged intimidatory to his political opponents. Nonetheless, Furness's nephew, Stephen, 'inherited' the constituency, holding it until his untimely death in 1914, following his fall from a hotel window. It was in these unusual circumstances that Runciman was hurriedly chosen to succeed him.

As one of the most prominent Liberals in the North-east, and certainly the wealthiest, he was an obvious choice at a time when the attention of many younger men was understandably diverted to the developing war in Europe. A beneficiary

The emergence of a hitherto neglected collection of private papers relating to a Liberal politician active in the first decades of the twentieth century is a matter of some note. In the case of Sir Walter Runciman, first Baron Runciman of Shoreston, however, it is not just the papers but the man himself who has so far been overlooked.

Sir Walter Runciman and the Runciman papers at Elshields Tower

of the parties' wartime electoral truce, Runciman was elected unopposed on 22 September. He retained the seat throughout the First World War, becoming associated with a group of Gladstonian Liberals, including his fellow shipowner, Richard Holt, MP for Hexham, who viewed with suspicion the increasing involvement of government in the national economy, which the war necessarily entailed.¹⁵ This group was fundamentally 'anti-war' and, though the papers do not throw light on this matter, its activities may have caused some difficulties for the younger Runciman. Though the latter had misgivings over some of the collectivist tendencies of the wartime government and produced an intellectually cogent objection to the introduction of conscription, he remained a cabinet minister until the fall of Asquith's administration in December 1916 and cannot be placed in the anti-war camp frequented by his father. In 1918, 'after running to and fro between [The Hartlepool] and Morpeth', Sir Walter failed to be nominated for either and made no further attempt to return to the Commons.¹⁶

~

A large quantity of Runciman papers, relating primarily to Walter junior but including also material relevant to his wife, Hilda (MP for St Ives, 1928–9), and to his father, was handed over to the Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, in 1969, with additional deposits in 1974, 1984 and 1989. However, a significant volume of correspondence, relating primarily to Sir Walter Runciman, remained in the possession of his grandson, Steven Runciman. The latter purchased Elshields Tower, a border towerhouse near Lockerbie, in 1966. The papers in question remained there, stored in his old study within the sixteenth-century tower, after his death in November 2000. The most important component of this collection consists of correspondence

between Sir Walter and his son, Walter junior, extending from the latter's time as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge until the former's death in 1937. The entirety of Sir Walter's side of this correspondence appears to have been retained at Elshields, but something like half of the letters written by his son were selected at an earlier date, for reasons no longer clear, for transfer to Newcastle. Much of the correspondence deals with purely family and business matters and would form a veritable treasure trove for anyone seeking to understand the rapid rise of a relatively humble Victorian family from almost total obscurity to financial and political prominence. Sir Walter's own letters do not always make for easy reading. His lack of a formal education is apparent, with clumsy sentence construction, erratic spelling – 'there' and 'their' are often confused – and punctuation seemingly regarded as an optional extra. To one letter he added the somewhat desperate postscript, 'Punctuate yourself. I haven't time.'¹⁷ Many letters, particularly from his later life, take the form of extended travelogues, as Runciman took himself off on cruises aboard his beloved yacht, *Sunbeam*, accompanied with varying degrees of enthusiasm by family members and friends. But these papers also throw much light on the hitherto neglected political figure of Runciman senior, while adding significantly to our understanding of his son's life and the influences upon his outlook and development. The older Runciman lived long enough to witness and comment upon almost the entirety of his son's extensive political career, only the latter's celebrated mission to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1938 and his brief and unsuccessful return to the cabinet (October 1938 – September 1939) occurring after the father's death. Finally, there are important insights to be gained relating to the wider fortunes of the Liberal Party. Both Runcimans were witnesses to and participants in the party's catastrophic decline, which took it over

Elshields Tower, Lochmaben, Lockerbie (<http://www.elshields.co.uk>)



the period covered from the status of a party of government to that of a minor political force of around twenty MPs.

Relations between father and son were close and largely harmonious, though Steven Runciman later suggested that, while Walter junior admired his father, he ‘slightly resented’ the latter’s efforts to muscle in on his political successes and also disliked his ‘cavalier’ treatment of his mother.¹⁸ What is certain is that both parents strove to shape their son’s outlook on the world. Sir Walter advised his then 14-year-old son to ‘keep out of the company of bad and thoughtless boys, attend to your Sunday School and YMCA, never relax your efforts in doing what is good and right’ and, more worryingly, ‘never choose a book for yourself, let your mother do so’.¹⁹ The young Runciman who wrote home from Cambridge a few years later clearly revealed the impact of a devout but somewhat puritanical upbringing. (Steven spoke of his father being ‘inspired with Nonconformist terrors by his very bigoted mother’.²⁰) The freshman had ‘definitely settled not to be anything else but a Methodist minister or something of that sort’. His ‘aim in life’ was ‘to benefit others and leave the world better than when I entered it’.²¹ His initial impressions of Cambridge were unfavourable. It was ‘such a bad place. Undergrad drunks are not bad compared to some other matters; simply disgusting, abominably devilish. AWFUL.’²² But there was little danger of this particular undergraduate going off the rails, as he consciously sought to restrict his circle of friends to fellow Wesleyans. An unauthorised theatre trip provoked parental disapproval and necessitated a lengthy explanation:

Now you are very much mistaken if you think that I have made a step in the wrong direction. The whole thing depends on the object that took me there ... I went of my own free will and with the simple object of seeing the thing for myself. I did not taste of the evil, as Mother says, I watched its progress ... I did not in the very slightest go to enjoy it, I went from as pure a Christian motive as ever I had ... If the evils of drink could *not* be seen *outside* a public-house, I would go to the public-house to see them; but it does not follow that I would drink some of their liquor ... I went to see how other people poisoned themselves and I came away quite uncontaminated.²³

This period saw both father and son adjusting to changes in their social standing, the result respectively of increasing affluence and higher education. For the father the issue at hand was a change of address. His words perhaps betray something of the attitude towards his wife of which Steven Runciman later complained:

Your mother and I can’t agree about where we should reside and [she] seems to wish her likes

Sir Walter advised his then 14-year-old son to ‘keep out of the company of bad and thoughtless boys, attend to your Sunday School and YMCA, never relax your efforts in doing what is good and right’ and, more worryingly, ‘never choose a book for yourself, let your mother do so’.

and not my comfort and desires should be considered. I cannot however allow what I conceive to be my best interests to be tampered with by anybody. Whatever I conceive to be for our common interest I will do, and nothing else ... Your mother’s idea of getting into agreeable society is a shadow and will never be really realised.²⁴

Runciman was sceptical about a move from South Shields to Newcastle, notwithstanding his wife’s belief that it would offer ‘more scope for social intercourse for us’. He had been warned that Newcastle was ‘offensively cliquish and difficult to make social headway in’.²⁵ For Walter junior there was the more mundane issue of a dinner invitation. ‘Don’t think that I delight in dinner parties,’ he reassured his mother. ‘I only went to old Moore’s to please him and let the other people see that I was not at all below them in social rank.’²⁶

Runciman junior faced his Tripos examination with some apprehension. ‘Many books are indeed the source of much weariness’, he concluded, ‘at any rate, that’s how I feel today.’²⁷ He found it difficult to describe his feelings when the ordeal was over. ‘“Tired” is not a sufficient word. Everything seems a kind of uneasy blank.’²⁸ In the event, he secured only a ‘third’ rather than the ‘first’ that has sometimes been suggested.²⁹ The succeeding May Week he found distasteful. ‘It is a bad business. Cambridge becomes a zoo, a museum and a Brighton in one – an abominable abuse of the place.’³⁰ Notwithstanding his earlier musings over a career in the church, it was probably inevitable that he should enter the family business. Indeed, he seems to have had little say in the matter. ‘I feel sure’, wrote his father, ‘the advice I give is the very best and logical you could get anywhere.’ Having given the matter full consideration, the elder Runciman had ‘decided that you should enter my office as soon as possible not for my sake so much as for your own, though I will be glad when I have an occasional rest’.³¹

Within two years the son had been made a partner. It was the occasion for more of the father’s homespun advice:

I have large hopes for the future and it will only be what we make it. So fix today your aims as high as you intend and would wish to attain. You have everything in your favour. Education, position, good associations and good earnest wishes for your future well being. Aim high and work hard is a very good ideal to fix in the mind... Fix on method and steady application, never leave undone for tomorrow what should be attended to today. Distribute your energy and it will grow. Don’t be content with our present position.³²

With these final words Runciman was thinking primarily of the expansion of the family’s business

Sir Walter Runciman and the Runciman papers at Elshields Tower

interests, but it was not long before he was also encouraging his son to broaden his horizons by embarking upon a political career. By the middle of the 1890s young Walter was being urged to look out for a suitable constituency. The papers throw little light on the son's first steps into the political arena, though it may be assumed that, at a time before the payment of MPs, the father's financial support was a critical factor. Surviving letters do contain accounts of some early successes in parliamentary debates, as well as young Walter's warning to his mother to expect defeat in Oldham in the general election of 1900: 'Churchill's "heroic" stories [of the Boer War] all have a sensational influence, so that you must look out for the worst.'³³

The young MP's career really took off once the Liberal government was formed in December 1905 and consolidated by an overwhelming popular endorsement in the general election of the following month. Promoted to the cabinet in 1908, he was 'the youngest man who has ever been Minister for Education and I need not tell you how grateful I am at the confidence shown in me'.³⁴ But the son's progress was not without its problems for his father, as the older man found himself out of sympathy with the broad thrust of the government's economic policy. A cause such as women's suffrage, in the long nineteenth-century Liberal tradition of righting a political injustice, excited the older Runciman's wholehearted support:

I think you will see a public declaration very shortly of my going over to the extreme section of women suffrage. I have been thinking about it for months and now I am convinced that had it been a man's agitation I would have been in the front of it. I think I have always leaned to the thought that women could not be kept outside the Franchise for long if they pursued the policy of proper agitation ... So I must get alongside of them as soon as I can find it opportune. Don't be taken aback if you hear a voice from the Strangers Gallery calling out for Woman suffrage and waving a banner over the heads of its opponents!³⁵

Similarly, as a longstanding temperance campaigner, he praised the licensing bill of 1908. But, as a businessman and Gladstonian Liberal, Runciman was inherently suspicious of government interference in the market and a firm believer in low taxation. Thus, the previous year's Workmen's Compensation Act was 'the clumsiest piece of doctrinaire work that has ever come from the hands of incompetent workmen'.³⁶

Runciman set out his creed in a letter to his son:

Personally I disagree with the whole financial policy. It may be free trade finance but in my opinion it is neither sound financially nor

politically, and grief will come of it. The commercial interests of the country have been alarmed and are sullenly waiting an opportunity of pronouncing their verdict ... Not a single person of the whole community will benefit by this whirlwind and thousands of poor creatures will be made to suffer and it will fall most upon those who have a struggle always to find food for the mouths of themselves and their families.³⁷

For all that, he ruled out the suggestion that he might leave the Liberal Party. 'I know whatever the Liberal party may do they aim at sane reform though it doesn't come off sometimes. Anyway it is the side we should be on even if they do lick the boots of the socialists.'³⁸ He was wary of the inter-party conference called to resolve the constitutional deadlock resulting from the Lords' rejection of Lloyd George's budget and hostile to the Chancellor's scathing attacks upon the Unionist peers. Yet the upper chamber's eventual submission to the parliament bill in the summer of 1911 filled him with contempt:

What a silly childish farce the Lords have exhibited. They have shown that intolerant spirit of ascendancy is still there. Nothing will wipe it out. It has been their habit whenever they have been attacked for misdeeds too glaring to pass by to adopt a policy of whining heroism and then like all despots slink into servility lest further trouble come to them.³⁹

There is only limited correspondence in the collection relating to the period of the First World War, the result no doubt of father and son, both now members of the House of Commons, being in less need of written communication. But an interesting letter from Sir Walter to his wife well captures the mood in much of the Liberal Party following Asquith's replacement as prime minister by Lloyd George in December 1916, while setting the tone of the Runciman family's attitude towards the latter over the following decade and a half:

We are all trying to prevent the very appearance of depression with not much success. The air is charged with it and we live in the atmosphere of it. It is not altogether personal, it is national, everybody but the yellow press who has made the position together with a few willing accomplices ... No coup could be brought about in the way it has without sowing seeds of bitter feeling. It could have been avoided but for the attitude of one man and his co-operators. The Party, i.e. the Liberal, met at the Reform Club y'day in large numbers ... It was a magnificent example of loyalty to witness the whole of the members of the late Government ex[cept] George standing by their chief in his hour of infinite trial brought about mainly by the man he had been a benefactor to.⁴⁰

As a businessman and Gladstonian Liberal, Runciman was inherently suspicious of government interference in the market and a firm believer in low taxation. Thus, the previous year's Workmen's Compensation Act was 'the clumsiest piece of doctrinaire work that has ever come from the hands of incompetent workmen'.

The aftermath of the Coupon Election of December 1918 found both father and son excluded from the House of Commons. The younger man declared that there was ‘no immediate prospect’ of his return to parliament, a development which would have ‘to wait for some little time, I fear’.⁴¹ But if it took until the general election of 1924 to see the resumption of Runciman junior’s Commons career, this was not for want of trying in the intervening period. He stood unsuccessfully in Edinburgh South (1920), Berwick-upon-Tweed (1922) and Brighton (1923) before being returned for Swansea West. In this near-continuous saga of electioneering, his father provided significant financial backing, support on the public platform and reassurance that present failures indicated the greater glories that Providence reserved for the future. After his son’s defeat at Berwick, Runciman wrote:

It may be that some other use is to be made of you or some more certain and enduring conquest awaits. I sincerely hope you will in a few days forget what must have been a bitter disappointment after all the hard work you put into organising and fighting for the seat.⁴²

When Walter was finally successful in Swansea, he reacted with words of which his father would have approved:

The election results in my Edinburgh and Berwick battles seem to be Providential, for I could never have held these seats and to have sat in the last two Parliaments would have worn me out uselessly and compromised me as well.⁴³

The son’s remarks also reflect the unease with which both men viewed the evolution of British politics in the immediate post-war era. The experience of the continuing coalition government confirmed Sir Walter in his existing mistrust of and hostility towards its prime minister, David Lloyd George. By the beginning of 1921 he was arguing that ‘[Lloyd] Georgism will bring the country to a peril that has never previously been known’.⁴⁴ It was a ‘national necessity’ that his government should ‘cease to carry on its policy of complete wreck of this and other countries’.⁴⁵ Yet, like many other ‘Asquithians’, Sir Walter despaired also of the leadership offered by Asquith himself. The Liberal leader was now but a pale shadow of the man who had dominated the party, and the country, before the First World War: ‘Strange that Asquith does not make a point of having regular meetings of his late colleagues and present supporters. The party cannot be efficiently organised unless there is some kind of system’.⁴⁶ He clearly looked to his son, still without a seat in parliament, to do something about this situation. ‘The country wants to be stirred and enlightened not lulled. I think you, [Sir John] Simon and Sir Donald [Maclean] should insist

on this with as much support as you can get from others’.⁴⁷ After the 1922 general election Runciman offered it as his ‘considered view’ that it would be better if Asquith went to the Lords and ‘a real inspiring Leader took his place’.⁴⁸

Yet Asquith hung on. In any case, the obvious alternative to him, especially after the nominal reunion of the party’s divided factions in 1923, was Lloyd George. But Runciman’s attitude towards the latter did not change from that expressed the previous year:

I cannot think it a safe or wise course to have LLG as Leader. He can only bring confusion and disaster in the end. We don’t want harum scarum competition with the Socialist Party.⁴⁹

The impasse in Liberal politics, and Lloyd George’s increasing power within it, led Runciman, perhaps inevitably, to wonder whether the time had come to change his political home. Asquith’s loss of his parliamentary seat (October 1924), subsequent elevation to the House of Lords (February 1925) and ultimate resignation of the party leadership (October 1926), by making Lloyd George’s succession all but inevitable, only exacerbated matters. ‘I am really very much inclined to leave the party’, Runciman confessed to his son, ‘and to go over [to the Conservatives]. [William Wedgwood] Benn is hobnobbing with Lloyd George and it really looks as though you are going to be left alone. I have no faith in any of them. Hence I lean towards severing my connection.’ And, of course, what applied to the father should apply also to the son: ‘You would be welcomed and treated better by the Conservatives than you have ever been by the Liberals.’ But the younger Runciman, now in his mid-50s and a leading player in Liberal politics in his own right, was less subject to his father’s ‘advice’ than had been the case in earlier years. Indeed, Sir Walter recognised that his own future political affiliation would be determined by his son’s actions. ‘If I remain longer it will only be on your account’.⁵⁰ In the event, though he did resign as chairman of the Northern Liberal Federation, he had to settle for the younger Runciman’s leadership of the so-called ‘Radical Group’, formed in December 1924 and, in the wake of Asquith’s final resignation, of the Liberal Council, effectively a party within the party designed to renounce Lloyd George’s leadership.

Even so, Sir Walter had no time for the radical policies with which Lloyd George sought to revitalise the Liberal Party in the late 1920s. Indeed, he still felt resentful about much of the pre-war government’s legislative programme, upon which Lloyd George was now trying to build:

The country is bleeding with the wounds inflicted upon it by Liberal legislation and I don’t care to be associated with them any longer. Trades disputes act, doles and other forms of

For all that, he ruled out the suggestion that he might leave the Liberal Party. ‘I know whatever the Liberal party may do they aim at sane reform though it doesn’t come off sometimes. Anyway it is the side we should be on even if they do lick the boots of the socialists.’

taxation on trade, on land and sea which are numbrous [sic] are the work of windbags and not constructive legislators ... No real national benefit will ever be derived by the men who have the silly reputation of being progressive.⁵¹

The response of this businessman to the general strike of 1926 and the continuing strike in the coalmines showed how far to the right within the Liberal spectrum he now stood:

I don't think the Government are so much to blame except that they have shown too accommodating an attitude to the Leaders [of the strike]. If it is incumbent on a Government to deal with the question at all, it should be by telling them that in the interests of the nation as a whole they must resume work and if they refuse then it is their duty to bring others to work the mines and deal with Messrs [Herbert] Smith and [A.J.] Cook [President and secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain] as Mussolini would under similar circumstances ... It is a strong man that is needed for a crisis like this.⁵²

Nor was Runciman's attraction towards the Italian fascist dictator a passing whim, occasioned by the frustrations of Britain's industrial troubles. Eight years later, by which time his son had returned to office as president of the Board of Trade in the National Government, Sir Walter hoped that a meeting with Mussolini could be arranged. His son duly obliged:

This morning the Italian Ambassador, Signor Grandi, was paying me a call and I told him that you are going to two or three Italian ports in 'Sunbeam' very soon. From one of these you will probably visit Rome and you want to pay a brief call on the Duce, for whom you have such a profound respect. The Italian Ambassador took note of the time of your probable visit.⁵³

The audience took place less than a month later, with the younger Runciman's enthusiastic encouragement:

I hope you saw the great man and amongst other things you were able to tell him how much I feel in sympathy with him ... It would be a calamity for both nations if the volume of trade between us is allowed to shrink, or to be diverted into other channels.⁵⁴

For the newly ennobled Baron Runciman it had been 'a great day' which 'finished up with a most interesting and decidedly impressive interview with the greatest human figure in Europe today whose forceful modesty is a strange fascinating power'.⁵⁵

Little correspondence with third parties survives in what is essentially an intra-family collection, though there are a few interesting letters

from Margot Asquith, written characteristically in pencil and with her trademark double or even triple underlining for emphasis. Sir Walter's first impressions of the eccentric Mrs Asquith had been extremely favourable: 'She is a most likeable person', he declared in 1920 after a meeting in which her forthcoming autobiography appears to have been the chief topic of conversation, 'perfectly frank and I think taking into consideration [Lloyd George's] characteristics much misjudged.' He could not recall ever having had such an entertaining and enjoyable hour's conversation with anyone else.⁵⁶ Margot did not relate easily to those of lowly birth. But it was in her interests to play up to Sir Walter. At a time when finance was a constant headache, he was one of the Liberal Party's principal donors. Information in Herbert Asquith's papers suggests that Runciman (£10,000) was the party's second largest contributor to Liberal expenses for the general election of 1922, exceeded only by Lord Cowdray (£12,000).⁵⁷ In an undated note to Sir Walter, Margot claimed to report a conversation with her husband who 'said to me the other day "We have 2 very fine Liberals, clever men and men of great character, if we had 10 more of these we cd sweep the country." He named you and Ld Cowdray'.⁵⁸

Sir Walter may have been susceptible to this sort of flattery. But while helping to keep the Liberal Party financially afloat was, at least in the early 1920s, still acceptable, underwriting Margot's notorious extravagance was a step too far. Mrs Asquith showed plenty of gall, if rather less judgement. 'You have always been a very true and affectionate friend to me,' she wrote in November 1924,

and now I am down and heart-sore, sleepless and sad I turn to you to ask you a real favour. You may say I'm a bore but for the moment I can think of no one else to turn to. I want to buy myself a little motor to drive myself about all over the country in. Henry's Rolls is too heavy for me and for £200 now the McKenna duties are off I can get perfection. It's rather cheek of me but I'm so ill with sorrow [presumably over her husband's defeat in the recent general election] that this is all I want for the moment.⁵⁹

There is no indication that Runciman succumbed to these entreaties. Even so, the by then widowed Margot despatched a second 'begging letter' a decade later:

You once said to me that you wd always help me if I were ever in trouble. Therefore I am in trouble today. The Duke of Bedford has raised all his rents here ... My brother Jack Tennant ... died while playing billiards 10 days ago, and with his death his annual allowance to me comes to an end. I am therefore very hard up ... There is no reason why you should help me, but if you cd send me a small cheque to help me to pay for the

'I don't think the Government are so much to blame except that they have shown too accommodating an attitude to the Leaders [of the strike]. If it is incumbent on a Government to deal with the question at all, it should be by telling them that in the interests of the nation as a whole they must resume work ...'

Christmas holidays and my presents to old servants I wd be deeply grateful.⁶⁰

At all events, as early as the mid-1920s, at the time of her husband's final withdrawal from the Liberal leadership, it clear that Sir Walter's view of the woman who was now Lady Oxford had markedly changed:

I had the interview with Lady Oxford. She blurted out as soon as I got into the room, 'Walter can be Prime Minister whenever he likes but he and you must put a quarter of a million. He can be the Leader of the Liberal party. Speeches are no use, it is money that is wanted.' ... She flung her arms and head about and reiterated that you could be the Leader of the party if you adopted her plan. I quietly replied, 'don't you think the proper procedure is for him to be asked?' She said, 'never. We will never bow our knee to him or anyone else.' But I said surely you don't suggest that he should ask the party to make him its Leader? ... She is really a clever incompetent person without any sense of proportion. I had her cornered every time and she could only wriggle out of how you could become Leader if you were not asked.⁶¹

The son's response to this report was both to the point and reassuring:

What you tell me about Margot is simply astounding: the woman is mad and (what matters more) she is libellous and mischievous. Anyhow you need have no fear – not a penny goes from me into any of their coffers.⁶²

Runciman junior's enthusiasm for his Swansea seat was of short duration. Evidently finding a Welsh constituency too susceptible to the influence of Lloyd George, he had decided before the end of 1926 not to contest it again, having already been approached by the Liberal Association in St Ives, Cornwall, to stand there instead: 'although St Ives is at present held by a Tory, they all think I would win it'.⁶³ In the event, the appointment of the sitting Conservative member, J. A. Hawke, as a High Court judge early in 1928 created a vacancy and precipitated a by-election earlier than Runciman might have wished. In these circumstances an approach was made to his wife Hilda to stand as the Liberal candidate, though 'they made it clear that I was only to be regarded as a stop gap and was dutifully to retire to let W[alter] stand at the General Election'.⁶⁴ After a vigorous campaign in which she successfully withstood the claim in *Punch* that she was no more than the 'wifely warming pan', Hilda secured the seat with a majority of 763 over her Conservative opponent. This was a time of several by-election victories, suggesting a conspicuous Liberal revival, though Runciman viewed his wife's achievement primarily in

terms of an advance for the anti-Lloyd George Liberal Council:

The influence of that win affects not only the Liberal Party but the country. And it makes our position one of greater strength than it has ever been before. This has indeed been a thrilling month.⁶⁵

Runciman senior preferred his own interpretation of his daughter-in-law's success:

I do not look on St Ives victory as a triumph so much as a destiny that should be carefully watched. I see in it a purpose for you and for Hilda which will show itself in due time. Don't throw it away.⁶⁶

Just as welcome, no doubt, as Runciman's words was his subsequent cheque for £21,500 – perhaps a million pounds in today's values. 'I am glad', he wrote, 'to be able to do something towards protecting you and all my kin from anxiety that cuts like a canker when it assails one.'⁶⁷

In the months preceding the general election of 1929 Sir Walter was negotiating to offer financial support to Liberal Council candidates who would 'fight free altogether of LG, his money and his policy, who if returned would refuse his leadership'.⁶⁸ Yet, motivated by the belief that Liberalism could at last make an electoral breakthrough, the party's disparate factions, younger Runciman included, put on a show of unity. Standing now to replace his wife in St Ives, Walter's support for the party leader was, however, at best qualified and he refused to endorse Lloyd George's specific pledge to reduce unemployment to normal proportions within a year:

As for the unemployed proposals I'm advocating the provision of work as warmly as Lloyd George, but I have not and shall not give a 'pledge' of what can be done, for I do not believe that we can get work soon enough to employ a million men in 12 months without any cost to the rates or taxes.⁶⁹

Sir Walter agreed: 'it is unwise to promise that an effort so vast will fructuate in twelve months'.⁷⁰ The prospect of success at the polls prompted the father to address another homily to his son:

The highest branches of the tree are within your reach. It is not by mere chance that you have been strong enough to withstand the storms of fortune ... it was doubtless the course your destiny should take to fit you for the higher branches that will soon be strong enough to bear you. You climbed fast in the beginning and for some reason or other a check came which seemed to indicate that your political career was at an end, but you were guided to toil on by the unseen force that governs us all, and you are

In the months preceding the general election of 1929 Sir Walter was negotiating to offer financial support to Liberal Council candidates who would 'fight free altogether of LG, his money and his policy, who if returned would refuse his leadership'.

Sir Walter Runciman and the Runciman papers at Elshields Tower

now being used to fill a position that providence has waiting for you either in a political or commercial sphere.⁷¹

The façade of party unity did not long survive the announcement of the election's disappointing outcome. While more than five million voters had supported the Liberal Party, 23.4 per cent of the total, this translated into no more than fifty-nine seats in the new House of Commons, an improvement of just nineteen on the figure secured in 1924. The performance of the Runcimans well illustrated the party's mixed fortunes. While Walter was duly returned in St Ives, Hilda, standing now in Tavistock, lost narrowly to her Conservative opponent. The younger Runciman soon found himself once more out of sympathy with Lloyd George's leadership and, after accepting the deputy chairmanship of the Royal Mail in November 1930, prepared to bow out of front-line politics, announcing the following February his intention not to stand again for parliament. But the collapse of the Labour government, its replacement by an all-party 'National' administration and strong hints from the prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, that he was likely to be recalled to high office prompted Runciman to change his mind. After the general election in October and the restoration of the cabinet to its normal size, the return to government duly took place.

Sir Walter hoped that his son might be offered the Exchequer. This was never a realistic aspiration, especially as the election had left the Conservatives dominant in the House of Commons. So while Neville Chamberlain took over as chancellor, Runciman was reinstated as president of the Board of Trade, a post he had first held during the First World War. Nonetheless, this was an important position, enabling him to effect the compromise with the Tories over tariffs that made the continuation of the National Government possible.⁷² Runciman now drifted, almost imperceptibly, into the Liberal National group led by John Simon, though he was never personally close to Simon himself. As Runciman was now bearing the costs of the local party organisation, it proved relatively easy to take the St Ives Liberal Association with him.⁷³ And, granted that the Liberal Nationals soon entered into political and electoral alliance with the Conservatives, the transition was entirely acceptable to Runciman senior, partially fulfilling the change of allegiance he had contemplated a decade earlier. Yet his own preference remained for an unequivocal commitment to the Conservatives. It was 'a waste of time remaining attached to what is now a reactionary party and its affairs and policy are "yelp" like a brood of puppies'.⁷⁴ It would be Baldwin, he insisted in 1936, 'if ever I go into politics again, I will join as my leader' – an unlikely proposition granted he was about to enter his ninetieth year!⁷⁵ The mainstream Liberal Party, which left the government after the conclusion of the Ottawa Agreements

of 1932, filled the old man with contempt. 'What a poor set the Libs are in opposition', he declared in 1934. 'The Budget is beyond their capacity to find a flaw they are capable of dealing practically with.'⁷⁶ But Lloyd George's attempts to re-enter the political arena via his 'New Deal' proposals of 1935 were more worrying: 'To my mind he produces the same old rags under different colours. People don't understand his flippant ingenuity so they open their mouths with astonishment and stamp him as a human oracle.'⁷⁷ When it briefly appeared that the Welshman might even join the National Government, Runciman was outraged: 'The hugging of LG to members of the Government frightens me. He is a monstrous danger to the country's best interests.'⁷⁸

The early 1930s also saw significant changes in Sir Walter's private life. After several years of declining health, his wife, Ann Margaret, died in February 1933. Thereafter, Runciman turned increasingly to Mary Richmond, who had joined the family circle to look after Ann Margaret in her illness. Despite family disapproval, there was even the suggestion of Sir Walter's remarriage. In the event, he settled for 'adopting' Mary Richmond as his niece and she remained his constant companion for the rest of his life. Later in 1933 Runciman was elevated to the peerage, taking the title of Baron Runciman of Shroston. This development, at a time before such titles could be disclaimed, had obvious implications for his son. Cuthbert Headlam, Conservative MP for Barnard Castle, recorded a lunch with the younger Runciman and his wife, Hilda: 'Mrs R told me that old Runciman got himself made a peer without saying a word about it to them: this seems incredible but may be true.'⁷⁹ Hilda Runciman, perhaps more ambitious for her husband than he was for himself, still nurtured hopes of his promotion to the Exchequer.

Despite his advanced years, Baron Runciman continued to enjoy reasonably good health, though he did suffer a serious fall in September 1934. Nonetheless, the possibility of a sudden by-election in St Ives became a matter of interest to local Liberals, determined to re-establish a presence in the constituency and recover the seat from the Liberal Nationals. Indeed, the younger Runciman became something of a bogeyman for the mainstream party following his intervention in Bodmin during the general election campaign of 1935, when his support for the Conservative candidate was widely blamed for the defeat of the incumbent Liberal, Isaac Foot.⁸⁰

By the beginning of 1936, the president of the Board of Trade, now in his mid-60s, was contemplating a return to the world of business. His father, however, encouraged him to keep his options open: 'there is nothing ... to favour your giving up public life. You cannot tell what form destiny has shaped for you.'⁸¹ Changes in the government were inevitable after the coronation, when Baldwin had indicated he would

... granted that the Liberal Nationals soon entered into political and electoral alliance with the Conservatives, the transition was entirely acceptable to Runciman senior, partially fulfilling the change of allegiance he had contemplated a decade earlier.

retire. Baron Runciman urged his son to consider a change of post, 'if not the Exchequer, the Admiralty ... The [new] PM whoever he is to be should hold up both hands for a man of such natural and varied knowledge as you.'⁸² In practice, of course, the succession of Neville Chamberlain to the premiership was all but inevitable and it was he rather than either of the Runcimans who would determine Walter's political future. Chamberlain had been unimpressed by his colleague's recent ministerial performance – the first hints perhaps of the illness that was to cloud Runciman's final years – and 'did not attach any particular importance to his retention in the Cabinet'.⁸³ The offer of the non-departmental post of Lord Privy Seal was angrily rejected – 'I suddenly realised ... how little value you attach to my services' – though the younger Runciman's subsequent elevation to a viscountcy assuaged some of his disappointment.⁸⁴ Characteristically, his father put the best possible interpretation on the course of events: 'be assured there is a big future before you. The day of your destiny has not yet ended.'⁸⁵ At a personal level, his son's elevation to the peerage gave him enormous pleasure: 'What a further joy and distinction to our family for both of us to sit in the Upper House as we did in the Commons.'⁸⁶

The father remained vigorous almost to the end, though he was denied the chance to sit with his son in the Lords. He retained a tight hold on his business affairs, acquiring a controlling interest in the Anchor Line (Glasgow) as late as 1935. Just over a month after his ninetieth birthday, however, Runciman died at his Newcastle home, Fernwood House.

~

Few private collections of papers, unless they were expressly created as documents of record, can provide anything like a continuous narrative of the period they cover. But, as in the case of the Runciman papers at Elshields Tower, they do throw illuminating shafts of light across the existing corpus of documentation, adding to the historical mosaic and thus enhancing our understanding of the past. The Elshields collection was examined when in the care of the Revd Dr Ann Shukman, great granddaughter of Sir Walter Runciman, but has recently been transferred to the University of Newcastle, where it will significantly augment what is already one of the most important private archives relating to the twentieth-century Liberal Party.⁸⁷

David Dutton is Professor Emeritus of Modern History at the University of Liverpool.

Unless otherwise stated, manuscript references are from the Runciman papers, formerly at Elshields Tower. Quotations from these papers appear by kind permission of the Revd Dr Ann Shukman. I have gained much understanding of the Runciman family from discussions with Dr Shukman. In these

notes, for the avoidance of confusion, the two 'Walter Runcimans' are referred to as 'Sir W. Runciman' and 'W. Runciman' irrespective of the actual title each held at any given date.

- 1 C. Cook, *Sources in British Political History 1900–1951*, vol. iv (London, 1977), p. 145.
- 2 See, for example, R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, companion vol. i, part 2 (London, 1967), p. 1033. In a biographical footnote reference to Walter Runciman junior, Randolph Churchill, or more probably one of his research assistants, writes of a man who was created baronet in 1906, Baron in 1933 and Viscount in 1937. But the first two of these honours relate to the father rather than the son.
- 3 Obituary of Sir Steven Runciman, *The Times*, 2 Nov. 2000.
- 4 Sir Walter Runciman, *Before the Mast – And After* (London, 1928), pp. 17, 36.
- 5 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 7 Jul. 1922.
- 6 Runciman, *Before the Mast*, p. 242.
- 7 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 7 Feb. 1892.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 29 Jul. 1891.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1928.
- 10 Runciman, *Before the Mast*, p. 272.
- 11 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 29 Jun. 1903.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 27 Jun. 1906.
- 13 The only biography of Walter Runciman junior is the unpublished PhD thesis by Jonathan Wallace, 'The Political Career of Walter (Viscount) Runciman', (Newcastle University, 1995). Several aspects of his career have, however, been well covered. See, inter alia, D. Dutton, 'Walter Runciman and the Decline of the Liberal Party', *Journal of Liberal History*, 84 (2014); T. McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 1, 2 (2003); T. McCulloch, 'Franklin Roosevelt and the Runciman Visit to Washington, 1937', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 4, 2 (2006); M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, 50, 1 (1971); P. Vysny, *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938* (Basingstoke, 2003); and D. Wrench, "'Very Peculiar Circumstances': Walter Runciman and the National Government, 1931–3", *Twentieth Century British History*, 11, 1 (2000).
- 14 *The Times*, 10 Dec. 1909, cited H. Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (London, 1967), p. 328.
- 15 D. Dutton (ed.), *Odyssey of an Edwardian Liberal* (Gloucester, 1989), pp. 48, 54.
- 16 *The Times*, 14 Aug. 1937.
- 17 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 20 Jul. 1884.
- 18 Steven Runciman on his father. Notes taken by John Grigg.
- 19 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 3 Aug. 1884.
- 20 Steven Runciman on his father. Notes taken by John Grigg.
- 21 W. Runciman to Sir W. Runciman, 15 Jan. 1889.
- 22 *Ibid.*, undated.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 5 May 1890.
- 24 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 21 Feb. 1892.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 7 Feb. 1892.
- 26 W. Runciman to mother, 19 Oct. 1890.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 21 Feb. 1892.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 12 Jun. 1892.
- 29 See, for example, obituary in the *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Nov. 1949. Jonathan Wallace repeats the error in his

At a personal level, his son's elevation to the peerage gave him enormous pleasure: 'What a further joy and distinction to our family for both of us to sit in the Upper House as we did in the Commons.'

Sir Walter Runciman and the Runciman papers at Elshields Tower

- biographical essay in D. Brack (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (London, 1998), p. 312.
- 30 W. Runciman to mother, 12 Jun. 1892.
- 31 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 7 Feb. 1892.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 1 Jan. 1894.
- 33 W. Runciman to mother, 30 Sep. 1900.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 11 Apr. 1908.
- 35 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 11 Jan. 1908.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1907.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1909. Sir Walter later wrote that the People's Budget represented the 'reverse of sound finance'. *Before the Mast*, p. 282.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1909.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 11 Aug. 1911.
- 40 Sir Walter Runciman to Lady Runciman 9 Dec. 1916. Following this meeting, Edwin Montagu wrote that he had been 'deeply moved' by 'Asquith's firm hold on the affections of the whole Liberal Party'. R. Jenkins, *Asquith* (London, 1986), p. 461.
- 41 W. Runciman to mother, 7 Feb. 1919.
- 42 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 18 Nov. 1922.
- 43 W. Runciman to Sir W. Runciman, 3 Nov. 1924.
- 44 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 25 Feb. 1921. Runciman later wrote of 'one of the most debasing epochs of recent political history'. *Before the Mast*, p. 280.
- 45 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 25 Apr. 1921.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1921.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1922.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, 30 July 1926.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 *Ibid.*, 9 Jun. 1926. Interestingly, Runciman was also a great admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, owned a considerable library of Napoleonic literature and himself added two books on this subject, *The Tragedy of St Helena* (1911) and *Drake, Nelson and Napoleon* (1919).
- 53 W. Runciman to Sir W. Runciman, 26 Mar. 1934.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1934.
- 55 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 13 Apr. 1934.
- 56 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 28 Apr. 1920.
- 57 R. Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (London, 1971), p. 181.
- 58 M. Asquith to Sir W. Runciman, undated (? early 1920s).
- 59 *Ibid.*, 1 Nov. 1924. For Margot Asquith's extravagance, see C. Clifford, *The Asquiths* (London, 2003), pp. 83–4.
- 60 M. Asquith to Sir W. Runciman, 4 Dec. 1935.
- 61 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 6 Nov. 1926.
- 62 W. Runciman to Sir W. Runciman, 9 Nov. 1926.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 27 July 1926.
- 64 Manuscript account by Hilda Runciman of her parliamentary career, 1928–9.
- 65 W. Runciman to Sir Walter Runciman, 17 Mar. 1928.
- 66 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 10 Mar. 1928.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1928.
- 68 Lord Gladstone to Sir W. Runciman, 19 Jan. 1929.
- 69 W. Runciman to Sir W. Runciman, 9 Mar. 1929.
- 70 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 11 Mar. 1929.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 14 Apr. 1929.
- 72 D. Wrench, '“Very Peculiar Circumstances”': Walter Runciman and the National Government, 1931–3', *Twentieth Century British History* 11, 1 (2000).
- 73 G. Tregidga, 'Turning of the Tide? A Case Study of the Liberal Party in Provincial Britain in the Late 1930s', *History* 92, 3 (2007), p. 354.
- 74 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 6 May 1934.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 28 May 1936.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 21 Apr. 1934.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 18 Jan. 1935.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 17 May 1935.
- 79 S. Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald* (London, 1992), p. 281.
- 80 Tregidga, 'Turning of the Tide?', p. 355.
- 81 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 27 Jan. 1936.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 23 Mar. 1937.
- 83 University of Birmingham, Chamberlain MSS, NC18/1/1006, N. Chamberlain to H. Chamberlain 30 May 1937.
- 84 *Ibid.*, NC7/11/30/112, W. Runciman to Chamberlain, 7 May 1937.
- 85 Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 29 May 1937.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 13 May 1937.
- 87 Sir Walter never forgot his own humble beginnings. One of the more attractive features of his character was his ongoing concern for his extended family and the help he offered to wayward nephews and nieces. He also diligently collected the surviving papers of his parents and siblings. These papers are presently housed at Elshields. It is Dr Shukman's wish that they too will, in due course, be added to the archive in Newcastle.

Letters to the Editor

Brecon & Radnor by-election

Like, I imagine, most people who were there, I have very happy memories of the 1985 by-election ('Richard Livsey and the Politics of Brecon and Radnor' – *Journal* 93, Winter 2016–17) – lovely scenery, great people and a terrific by-election buzz.

Two moments, particularly, stand out for me. The first was a real old-style rally with an array of speakers, including an inspiring address by Shirley Williams. There was also a piece of superb comedy from the great and sadly missed David Penhaligon, who informed the audience

that he had been instructed to introduce David Owen, the next speaker, as a fellow West Countryman. Though professing not to know Dr Owen, he had come to the conclusion that this was fitting 'as I'm just a country bumpkin and he's one of the city sophisticates'. The audience erupted into laughter, apart from the humourless Owen.

My second memory is of a post-campaigning evening spent in the bar of Brecon's main hotel. It was a large room with big tables laid out for occupation by the different parties contesting the

election. As we were settling down for some serious drinking, Screaming Lord Sutch, by now a by-election veteran, burst in plus guitar, appealing to our generosity to give him money towards his deposit in return for a few tunes. After a rousing rendition of 'Jailhouse Rock', he approached the Labour table to be shooed away. I'm happy to report that he received much better treatment from the Alliance table – and what a charming guy he was.

Mike Falchikov