

LORD FAULKNER RECALLS THE BIRTH OF THE HOUSE MAGAZINE

At that time I had just started my own political consultancy company, and I was looking for ways in which I could help my clients communicate their messages to Members of both Houses of Parliament, in an open, ethical and cost-effective way. We looked

We talked endlessly about the editorial content and how we could get the publication accepted by MPs and the House authorities. It was obviously important to ensure that advertising and lobbying material didn't swamp the editorial, and also that it did not give offence to the readers. A very early decision was that all ads had to comply with Advertising Standards Authority rules and be clearly attributed; we would also reserve the right to refuse any advertisement.

We spent some time discussing possible names for the publication. I claim the credit for proposing 'The House Magazine': this combined the concept of an in-house journal, with the colloquial name for Parliament.



Mike had the idea of producing a weekly profile of an MP, which would be illustrated by a not unflattering caricature drawn by a leading cartoonist. His thought was that these could be modelled on the Spy cartoons of the Victorian and Edwardian era, and possibly later be reproduced as collectors' items.

Somewhat naively, we imagined that we could set up such a venture with almost no capital. I contributed £300 towards a total of £1,000 (Mike and his brother-in-law found the rest), and we planned to produce our first issue for the week that the Commons returned after the 1976 summer recess. We found a printer, recruited a design consultant, appointed someone in charge of production, and then produced a dummy issue which would be used to attract advertisers.

The very first issue was published on 11 October 1976. The front page profile was of George Strauss, MP for Vauxhall and Father of the House (pictured, far left). The edition contained details of the forthcoming week's business in both Houses, progress of legislation, a list

of lobby correspondents, some helpful phone numbers of people and departments in the House, a page of who was who in the nationalised industries, changes in committee membership, and lists of ministers and Liberal Party front bench spokesmen (sic).-

The most daring item was a diary written by Hugh McPherson of *Tribune*, under the pseudonym 'Guy Fawkes'. A flavour of his style appears in this extract:

"...it was with alarm that Fawkes read on Tuesday the 12th October the Earl of Kimberley will ask whether it is true that Her Majesty's Government have cancelled their order for MADGE. Is there to be another countess for the elegant Earl who was married in 1945, 1949, 1953, 1961 and 1970 - a record for the House? All is for the best, however, for MADGE apparently stands for Microwave Aircraft Digital Guidance Equipment." The Fawkes diary is sadly no more.

We also had some fun writing imaginary classified advertisements for the first issue, in case genuine ads didn't appear. We wondered whether 'Lonely MP



seeks congenial female company during long whipped evenings' would cause offence, and decided that it would. The made-up entries weren't needed however, as 18 genuine items were submitted, ranging from 'Professional tuition in classical guitar' to 'Town House near Vauxhall Bridge, overlooking park £24,500'.

The display advertisements were crucial for the magazine's survival, and we worried first whether we would get any at all, and secondly if we did, whether they would annoy our readers.

Animal rights campaigners dominated our early advertising. The League Against Cruel Sports took the whole centre page double-spread, with a demand for support for a Private Member's Bill to ban live hare coursing, and the National Anti-Vivisection Society booked a page attacking experiments on live animals.

The first problems we had over the suitability of advertisements came when some MPs objected to the libertarian Freedom Association buying space and

distributing material. This was resolved fairly amicably, as I recall.

When the magazine started, we worked out of offices at 191 Wardour Street in Soho. But within four months we moved to rather larger accommodation in Blackfriars. There, a happy office was established where the staff included my wife, Sue, and Ann Gibson, now a colleague of mine in the House of Lords as Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen. It was obvious from the beginning that we were hopelessly under-capitalised, and Mike and I knew that we either had to find a heavyweight backer, or face closure. We were rescued by the Institution of Electrical Engineers in June 1977, which acquired our share capital at its par value. My involvement diminished thereafter, but I am delighted that the magazine continues to flourish.

LORD FAULKNER OF WORCESTER IS A LABOUR PEER

A version of this article appeared in *The House Magazine's* 25th anniversary edition

The House Magazine

No 179 Vol 6 Friday October 16

Journal of the Houses of Parliament

al Parkinson

Dame Judith Hart

Conference Issue

The House Magazine

Journal of the Houses of Parliament

No 197 Vol 7 Friday, March 10



Robin Cook Edinburgh Central

The House Magazine

No 236 Vol 8 April 22, 1983

Weekly Journal of the Houses of Parliament

What Future For The Lords?
Congressional Brief
Staff Correspondent Michael R Saks
Committee Corridors
The Record
Report Summaries
Handling of Press and
Public Information during
the Falklands Conflict
British Steel Corporation's
Prospects
Tomorrow in Parliament
The New Telephone
Exchange
New Parliamentary
Building (Phase 1)
Legislation Summaries
The Minute Rule Bill
Wells, MP

