

Kevin D'Arcy Dinner speech
By Kevin d'Arcy

Hello. I was executive secretary of this section for over 20 years and I have to say it was a fine way to make friends.

I was introduced in 1974 by the young Paul Hodgson after we'd met at the BBC, and Paul went on to be a most excellent branch chairman for many years. He could turn any meeting into a party without ever losing the necessary dose of dignity. He brought me in when I was editing a newsletter for the FT called Community Markets. The FT had yet to decide whether this Europe thing was going to be important enough for the paper proper. I later moved to The Economist, and then to Millbank Tower, round the corner from here, to head media relations for the National Economic Development Council, so had the tools to contact every journalist in Britain. The section swiftly grew from a handful of members to over forty regulars. Many have now passed on. Paul's father, also Paul, who created the section and kept it - and the whole of the AEJ, as president - very much alive for so many years. Roger Broad, another founder member, ex FT, ex European Parliament, who became our first treasurer. Gerry Mansell, the elegant French immigrant who went on to run the BBC World Service for decades. Don Hatwell, the secretary before me, who I always thought of as an expert in the art of living, especially in colourful waistcoats and bow ties. The super-sociable American Frank Gray, who took over my seat at the FT when I moved into radio. He recruited much of the foreign staff there, while I recruited Celia Hampton, who everyone of course remembers. We have also had Bridget Kendall, Edward Mortimer, Peter Snow and Boris Johnson - before he got the sack from The Times - and the late Malcolm Rutherford, when he revealed in the FT Michael Heseltine's plan to unseat Margaret Thatcher. Plus - always plus - the very much missed Andrew Mango, who called himself a Levantine and who always moved the vote of thanks at general assemblies with such eloquence and in any one of sixteen languages.

Of course, the art of living, in this case, has always gone along with the art of the grape. And the art of the joke.

Consider Hans Jaecker, head of the BBC German Service. As I was waiting on the hotel steps to receive the Japanese ambassador Hans lent down as he passed and whispered in my ear 'Don't mention the war'. Clearly, some Germans could joke. A notable exception, of course, was Gunther Wagenlehner, who was the general secretary for 28 years and who passed away 12 years ago. Everyone called him The Fuhrer. He had a tough war. He was locked up by the Germans, the Russians and the British. And his idea of democracy was to make all the decisions and wait to be thanked. Which he always was, if only because he certainly got things done. I think it is true to say that the AEJ would not exist today without him. So - I miss the Germans. I suppose our finest hour, or year, in Britain was staging the annual congress in London in 1992. We welcomed 400 delegates and they did not have to pay a penny. Our sponsors paid all air fares, all hotels, all food, all drink. We took over two hotels and the QE2 conference centre. We had over 100 speakers. We worked them very hard. But, in between sessions, they had live music, from wind bands to string quartets. We were slightly worried about the Fuhrer, but we were lucky to have the lovely Barbara Beck as a member, a German, a

senior editor at The Economist and chair of the Reform Club, who clearly knew what to do. Roger Broad whispered to me afterwards that this was the very first congress to make a profit. (This is a secret, of course, between me and you.)

Mind you, it has never been easy to be English in Europe. People have such high expectations. For instance, in Malta I found myself listed as a knight - in Malta - so was first to be presented to the prime minister and president. Afterwards, Roger Broad gave me this [Knights of Malta] tie. He seemed to think it was a joke.