

**David Haworth, UK Section member in the “early years”; now lives and works in Brussels**

AEJ UK 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner: London, 28 September 2018

At a certain point in the Seventies during an AEJ event in Rome, I had the luck to sit next to the BBC’s correspondent there, David Willey, who in an earlier career phase had been a junior trainee reporter for Reuters in the eternal city.

In that lowly capacity, he told me, & because of it, he was sent to Rome on the wet afternoon of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1957 to cover “a meeting of some sort with a signing at the end of it.”

There was no Fleet Street interest, his desk told him, the British had been invited with an observer status & had turned it down, but the agency was still obliged to cover.

Willey did his duty -- & witnessed the signing of the Treaty of Rome.

To the Osservatore Romano it was “the most illustrious & significant international event in the modern history of Rome.”

The Times of London, using David’s copy, gave it one third of a column on Page 8 with the terse headline “Historic Date” – thus displaying a sulky ignorance which even now can be seen up & down the British media.

Back then they might have managed a glimmer of fun &/or derision had they known that only the first & the last pages of the documents on trestle tables were printed.

The telephone book size pile of documents in between the covers remained blank --- this a consequence of the late arrival of the train carrying the printed versions from Brussels plus the misapprehension of cleaners in Rome that all the paperwork was only rubbish & threw it away before the dignitaries arrived!

So here we are in the slough of Brexit or, as the Anglos in Brussels call it, MBD.

[Mad Brexit Disease.]

Ian Jack, former editor of The Independent on Sunday, has described the media context rather well.

“Britain has developed a singular sort of media culture which places a high premium on excitement, controversy & sentimentality, in which information takes second place to the opinions it arouses.”

And how, we might all say – in the midst of the worst public schism since the Reformation.

Anyway, just over 50 years ago the word went out & a rather vigorous British Section was formed -- & I'm glad to say it remains so – more vigorous than several sister Sections on the Continent & I'm rather sure that will also remain the case, despite & because of, Brexit.

As a long-ago predecessor of William Horsley, I recall one of our first lunch guests was Edward Heath & the rank of speakers has remained high ever since.

In 1971 I & colleagues organised the first ever AEJ AGM in the UK which was split between the capital & Bristol, the then ever helpful FCO & also the Commission helping to defray the costs.

Innocent days.

But I think the membership acknowledged, & I hope still does, that if you look for differences on the home scene they are quite often greater & sharper than when you search for your equivalent on the continent.

Professionally & politically I think that is the lesson AEJ membership teaches.

I shall not resist quoting Henry James's "The Europeans":

"You intend to return to Europe & resume your irregular manner of life?" Mr. Wentworth inquired.

"I can't say I intend. But it's very likely I shall go back to Europe. After all, I am European. I feel that, you know."

In conclusion I would like to thank William, Firdevs & no doubt other colleagues for arranging this defiant birthday party. It has been a splendid & memorable event.

When an exhausted Winston Churchill was pressed to meet yet another group of his Woodford admirers during the 1945 election campaign who wanted one of those characteristic rumblings of inspiring rhetoric, he gave instead the shortest speech of his life.

"JUST CARRY ON," he said.

Ends