

**Matthew Oakeshott's Speech Remembering  
Roy and Jennifer Jenkins at the Unveiling of their Blue Plaque  
at East Hendred, Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

Thank you so much, Charles, for inviting me to stand in as Bill Rodgers' understudy today. Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank was for so long Roy's alter ego and loyal lieutenant, then joint Leader and Founder of the SDP and Roy's successor as Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Lords.

Juliet, will you tell your father he is much missed, congratulate him for us on his 95<sup>th</sup> birthday next month and ask him if he ever completed that elegiac poem he started:

*"They are mixing dry martinis at East Hendred,  
The croquet balls are clinking on the grass ....."*

Twenty years on from Roy's death and six years from Jennifer's, we will all have our own happy and special memories of how they brightened and often changed our lives. May I just share a few of mine, from my first meeting with Roy in 1966 to our last in late 2002? Roy and Jennifer so loved this house and place, as a refuge from high office, and as an energising base for Roy's writing and later Oxford Chancellorial duties as he wound down from frontline politics. Coming here was always a great treat for so many of us, as it is today.

I first met Roy 57 years ago, a year after Jennifer and he had bought this house at auction in Abingdon for £7,000. Jennifer spent over their agreed budget limit – the only time that was ever known to happen that way round in their life together. In 1966 Roy was just 46 and I was 19, Chairman of the Oxford University Labour Club and overjoyed to get our dynamic, young, reforming Home Secretary as my star speaker and a great boost to our membership and morale.

I first came to East Hendred 5½ years later in Spring 1972 when Roy was fighting to keep the European flag flying within the Labour party as a beleaguered Shadow Chancellor and Deputy Leader. The Rowntree Trust had generously given money – £2500 a year was the salary, I recall – to leading Shadow Ministers to employ Special Advisers. I sat on the sofa being interviewed by Roy – and Jennifer – in equal measure. They gave me the job and changed my life.

But barely was the ink dry on my job offer when Roy resigned as Deputy Leader and Shadow Chancellor in protest against Harold Wilson's decision to call for a Referendum on Britain's membership of the European Community. Wrong in principle, wrong when we won, wrong when we lost....

Straight away Roy rang me, apologised and offered to fix me up with the same job for the new Deputy Leader. I just said no thanks, I wanted to work for him and he got Rowntree to cough up for me too. He barely knew me, but was so supportive and loyal. That was the Roy I always knew and loved, as many of you here did too.

From 1972 to 1976 I was also an Oxford City Councillor, so often came down here to work with Roy before we went up to Parliament or out on constituency visits and speeches.

You called Ivor Bulmer-Thomas a man of many talents, Charles. Well, your father was that in spades. As well as being a professional writer and historian, he was a true connoisseur of music and art and had the most amazing knowledge of history, geography, election results, and railway timetables.

I remember in the February '74 General Election, after a morning campaigning in his constituency in Birmingham, we got into a rather faded first-class carriage on a cross-country train down to Plymouth to speak for David Owen that evening. Luckily we were in good time catching a train for once. To Roy's horror there was no restaurant car. We jumped out, bought some sandwiches and a decent bottle of claret at the New Street station buffet (you can tell this was 50 years ago!) and hopped back in.

Roy then proceeded to give me a running commentary as we rattled through the West Country on how Labour had won this seat for the first time in 1929, or ten minutes later on how the Liberals had won that seat in 1929 although the Tories had held it even in 1906. After a bit of chit-chat on whether a local branch line had closed before or in the Beeching cuts, suddenly, as we approached Exeter, Roy switched the searchlight of his total concentration on to what he should say at the meeting in Plymouth.

I worked for Roy until 1976 when he became President of the European Commission. He asked me to work in his Cabinet in Brussels but I'd got engaged to Dr, now Professor – Pippa here. So he kindly gave a speech at our wedding instead.

He gave me three introductions for a job in the City: to the Governor of the Bank of England, the Chairman of Warburgs and Lord Rothschild. Thank you Roy! As it happens, I went to Warburgs, but that shows you how seriously Roy was admired, liked and trusted as the Chancellor who saved Britain from the rocks.

How much we need his like now.

Thank you to the Jenkins family for keeping us all so well fed and watered –Roy would have said ‘provendered’ – literally, intellectually, politically and personally over all these years. And thank you Jennifer, you were simply the best judge of politics and people I’ve ever known.

In September 2002 I saw Roy for the last time, 56 years after we first met. I sat just behind him as he made his last speech in the Lords. He was warning against the looming invasion of Iraq. He argued that ‘an attack to take out a contingent future threat’ – he was referring to possible weapons of mass destruction – ‘could increase the risk of terrorism’. ‘Furthermore’, he said ‘when we have embarked on a policy of taking out undesirable regimes by external armed force, where do we stop? I am in favour of courage but not of treating it as a substitute for wisdom as I fear we are currently in danger of doing.’

What a wise, what a brave, what a brilliant man.”