



## How we began

BAP can be said, unusually, to have three histories: a factual narrative, a broader tale of interconnected life stories, and a conspiracy theory.

The simplest version is this: the seed of BAP was planted by a group of young UK foreign-policy enthusiasts, who developed it from an idea in 1982 to its first conference in 1985. The second element is the story of how the Project was funded and encouraged in those early years, deriving as it does from a lifelong friendship between a British industrialist and an American lawyer who had met at college in the 1930s and served their respective countries in wartime.

Then there is a third, more imaginative version of BAP's origins, which lives on the internet but is wholly false; that one is unpicked at the end of this essay.

## Nick Butler's memorandum



On 24 May 1982, Nick Butler, then a 27-year-old Research Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (usually known as Chatham House, the name of its building in St James's Square in London), wrote a memorandum to David Watt, the director of Chatham House, headed "Anglo-US contacts". It began: "I have been having discussions...

about the possibility of establishing some form of regular contact for Britons and Americans similar in style and purpose to Königswinter but for a slightly younger age group. We started from the point of view that, as well as the active hostility to all things American from some parts of the political spectrum here, there is in addition a serious lack of mutual understanding over a wide range of policies."

Butler, who was treasurer of the Fabian Society and a prospective Labour parliamentary candidate, came from the "centre left" of British politics. As an economist with the oil giant British Petroleum before and after his

secondment to Chatham House, he had a direct view of Anglo-American economic relationships which was unusual in Labour circles. He was also an enthusiast for international discussion forums. He later told the story of attending a rather austere Königswinter gathering in barrack-like accommodation; lying on his hard bed he thought: "I bet America would be more fun."

But the traditional British left-wing remained deeply suspicious of the United States, particularly on foreign policy and security issues: this was the era of Michael Foot's leadership of a Labour Party committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament. There was, however, a growing interest among Butler's own peer-group in American ideas: "how cities are regenerated, how market forces worked, and so on". But there were few mechanisms available for useful contact, because the strongest Anglo-American relationship "had always been focused on the right of the political spectrum and the older generation, and there was nothing to renew it or broaden it".

Butler's initial step had been to contact Maxine Vlieland, who was general secretary of the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government and the organiser of the British side of the Königswinter conferences. These were to provide a first model for the BAP. Maxine's husband Pieter, a Sunday Telegraph journalist, was also involved in Königswinter, and the couple ran a business called Specialist Conferences. Maxine saw immediately a need for political balance in the construction of the Project, and it was she who brought in Dr Christopher Coker, a defence expert and lecturer at the London School of Economics with distinctly conservative views.

This foursome "sat and chatted and drank quite a lot", Maxine says; they also opened a dialogue with the US Embassy. In due course they were ready to put Butler's idea to David Watt: the hope was to establish a regular annual conference for 25 to 40-year-olds from a wide variety of backgrounds, alternating between the US and Britain and covering "each of the areas of contention and misunderstanding — economic policy, defence, international relations — possibly taking a different topic each year".

Watt supported them, and the Project was officially endorsed by Chatham House. It also received the backing of the English-Speaking Union, whose director-general, Alan Lee Williams (a former Labour MP, later chairman of the Atlantic Council) became one of the first members of BAP's UK Advisory Board.

Group Captain David Bolton, director of the Royal United Services Institute, Britain's senior defence forum, was also brought in, with a different professional perspective on traditional links across the Atlantic: even in the military sphere, he felt, "connections had faded". With the reduction in the size of forces and the opportunities to serve together, the number of personal contacts was greatly diminished. "The Americans, to some extent, felt they had much less need of us, and we had far fewer means of influencing them. It was a sin of omission that needed to be repaired." But Bolton never wanted the Project to have a military flavour; he was convinced that it should be interdisciplinary, with as wide a spectrum of political opinion as possible.

Others who came in at an early stage were the management consultant and businessman Dennis (later Lord) Stevenson and Sir Michael Palliser, a former head of the Foreign Office who had been a special adviser to the Prime Minister during the Falklands War. The US embassy provided a grant of £1,000 to fund a first fact-finding trip to Washington by Butler, Coker and the Vlielands in the summer of 1983.

Their challenge was to find sufficient funding for a first conference, but the response from potential British sources was "get it going first, then come back to us", according to Maxine Vlieland. The American side was "more open-minded", but no real progress was made until the idea was put — by Butler and Watt, at a meeting at Chatham House — to Sir Charles Villiers, the former chairman of British Steel Corporation.

A scion of the Earls of Clarendon (whose title dates from 1776 and whose family name is pronounced, in the aristocratic way, "Villers"), Charles Villiers seemed in appearance, manner and career path to be a stereotypical example of the British patrician class. During his time as chairman of British Steel, a loss-making state-owned enterprise crippled by inefficiency, under-investment and strikes, he had been lampooned by the press and trade union leaders as an archaic figure; yet, with very little political support, he initiated a radical restructuring of the company which set it on an entirely new path — and for which his successors were to take most of the credit.



He was indeed, in that old-fashioned phrase, "an officer and a gentleman", but he was also — as the former Foreign Secretary (and later BAP Advisory Board chairman) Lord Carrington observed at a service of thanksgiving for Villiers's life in March 1992 — "a most unorthodox man, in the sense that

he did not always think or behave in the way which one would expect of someone of his background". Villiers embraced the BAP concept, and became its first senior figurehead.

## Oxford 1934

"Our first encounter was not very promising," Villiers wrote in his memoir *Beyond the Sunset*. "I was lounging around the entrance of New College, when a sturdy, rugged figure in a sweater and sneakers came at me straight across the hallowed turf, where no man walked except an old gardener with a long white beard... The figure came nearer and nearer and thrust out a hand, saying very positively 'Van Dusen'."

"I was unused to this head-on introduction and, feeling rather a shrinking violet, I only smiled back. 'Well,' he said, 'what's your name?' I thought this was a bit much and just kept on smiling. 'Don't you remember it?' he said. Well, of course at that point my defences collapsed and I confided my surname and we went off to the steward's pantry in the Junior Common Room for some mulled claret..."



That meeting in Oxford in October 1934 — capturing the eternal contrast between British reserve and American self-confidence — was the beginning of a friendship between Charles Villiers and Lewis Van Dusen, Jr from Philadelphia which was to last until Villiers's death, aged 79, in January 1992. Like all good historical anecdotes, it is told in different versions: in Van Dusen's recollection, Villiers — who was certainly no shrinking violet, having been a member of 'Pop', the prefectorial élite at Eton, as well as Senior Cadet Officer and Captain of Games — gave him a pretty severe dressing down for walking on the forbidden grass.

But however their conversation began, there was scarcely a month in the succeeding 57 years in which they were not "in touch by letter, phone or visit", as Villiers put it. The idea of creating, in a younger generation, a multiplicity of transatlantic friendships like their own, was what drew them both to the concept of BAP when it was put to Villiers by Butler and Watt and when Villiers took it to Philadelphia to discuss with Van Dusen.

It was the two of them, with Lew's friend Isadore ("Scotty") Scott, who found the funding that enabled the Project to happen: and their life stories

encapsulate the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-Century Anglo-American kinship that Nick Butler felt had begun to fade by the 1980s.

### **"A most unorthodox man"**

Before going up to Oxford in 1933, Villiers had worked — to the horror of his mother and stepfather — as assistant to the Rev "Tubby" Clayton, who ran the Toc H hostels for the homeless in East London. "Charles came to us from Eton, as proud as Lucifer, and we made him scrub floors," Clayton used to tell visitors. The experience inculcated, in Lord Carrington's words, "a deep and abiding social conscience which motivated the rest of life and career".

After the rigours of Toc H, Oxford was "an utterly enchanting world". Once the ice had been melted by mulled claret, Lew Van Dusen became Villiers's "constant companion" — the two can be seen together in the New College rugby team photograph of 1934/35. After graduation, Villiers began his career as a banker in the City of London and joined the reserve of officers of the Grenadier Guards. Though he reckoned himself to be "considered rather 'unsound' for going off to work for Toc H", he had laid the foundations of a comfortable, conventional Establishment life.

But he was about to undergo personal tragedy and wartime experiences which called for rare reserves of character. Having been rescued from the beaches of Dunkirk in June 1940, he was watching an air display on Salisbury Plain some months later, when he was accidentally shot through the cheek and collarbone by a Hurricane pilot who thought he was shooting at mock-up targets. The repair of Villiers's jawbone (using a section of his hip) took fifteen months and sixteen plastic surgery operations. While he was recuperating, his young wife Pamela died giving birth to a stillborn son.

But Villiers returned to active service as soon as he was fit: having volunteered for the Special Operations Executive, he was parachuted into Yugoslavia to help Tito and his partisans in subversive activities against the Germans. It was extraordinarily dangerous work, requiring "extreme physical fitness, strength and endurance, broad experience with explosives, quick reaction with hand and tommy guns, knowledge of the local language and political complications and, of course, being a reliable parachutist and swimmer and able to live off the land. I loved all that..."

One more passage from *Beyond the Sunset* vividly captures both the experience of guerrilla warfare and the strength of Villiers's character. It describes him and a brother officer, Hesketh Pritchard, hiding from German patrols in a Yugoslavian forest:

"We crawled into a deep thicket. The Germans had dogs and the risk of being caught was very great. I held my revolver at Hesketh Pritchard's head and he held his at mine; we would both have pressed the trigger, simultaneously, if the Germans had found us. We believed we would have been tortured for all the information we carried in our heads, so better to end it all before that happened."

Villiers was promoted lieutenant colonel and was awarded the Military Cross, one of the highest British awards for gallantry, in 1945. After demobilisation, he returned to the City of London to join the merchant bank Helbert Wagg, later part of Schroders.

It was not until 1954 that he became a regular visitor to the United States. To characterise Villiers as a lifelong Atlanticist would be wrong. He was an internationalist who enjoyed, and drew inspiration from, his contacts with many parts of the world. His former assistant, '86 BAP Fellow Chris Beauman, calls him "a very natural European", whose career in banking in the 1950s and early '60s, and in steel in the 1970s, was very much oriented towards dealings with France, Germany and Belgium. And he was passionately interested in Japan, especially for what it had to teach the western world about industrial modernisation.

In this as in other spheres, "he always thought of himself as ahead of his times," said his widow, Lady (Marie José) Villiers — who is herself remembered as a courageous wartime Belgian resistance agent. It was characteristic that, instead of choosing to live in the kind of 18th century mansion usually preferred by gentlemen bankers, Villiers bought a wooded plot on the edge of Windsor Great Park in the early 1960s and built a modern house on it; he also designed his own garden.

Villiers's *Daily Telegraph* obituary observed that "he liked to think of himself as 'a radical Tory' in the mould of Harold Macmillan, whom he physically resembled". His willingness to look for new solutions to British economic decline came to the fore in his appointment in 1968 as managing director of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, an agency of Harold Wilson's Labour government set up to reshape whole industries, forcing consolidation to enable the survivors (many of them state-owned) the better to hold their own against foreign competition. In conservative

business circles, the IRC was regarded with deep suspicion: Lady Villiers recalls being cold-shouldered by City acquaintances at the Royal Ascot race meeting shortly after Charles accepted the job.

But to Villiers, the IRC was an opportunity to try out new ideas, to make a contribution to public service, and to work with an exceptional team of young managers — many of whom have since risen to the heights of the British business world. As Chris Beauman says, Villiers loved networking. "He relished the buzz of having energetic, clever, younger people around him. Encouraging youth was a consistent theme of his life. He saw it in terms of releasing energy. He was very messianic about it."

It is easy to see why these predispositions attuned so well with the BAP concept, and why Villiers took on the role of BAP founder-chairman with such alacrity. The discussions arose at a moment when, having recently retired from his arduous tenure at British Steel, Villiers had time and energy available to take on something new. And the resilience which had sustained him at British Steel, "my cult of a positive mental attitude", was very much influenced by his experience of the United States.

His first trip in 1954 — to New York, Philadelphia, Washington, across Canada and down to San Francisco — had been something of a revelation, "a mind-stretching exercise, from which I have not yet recovered," he wrote at the end of his life. "Everything was "can do", the opportunities were boundless... everyone talked with everyone else, you had a really "classless" feeling about society in America... All the time I kept thinking that America was a new, but mature country, and that Britain had to buck up. As Tennyson has Ulysses say, "Tis not too late to seek a newer world". All this has stayed and grown in me."

After that first visit, Villiers returned to the United States almost every year. His family acquired an American branch through the marriage of his eldest daughter Diana to John Negroponete, a US State Department official who became ambassador to the UN and Iraq, and later Deputy Secretary of State. "I love the country and its people," Villiers wrote. And the central factor in that relationship was his lifelong friendship with Lew Van Dusen.

### **"Van Dusen: force and subtlety"**

One of the least well-known facts about Lew Van Dusen is that he was half English. His maternal grandfather, Francis Bassett Lund of Tiddington, Oxfordshire, was an officer of the Seaforth Highlanders who fought at the Relief of Lucknow in the Indian Mutiny. But Lew's paternal forebears were,

as the surname suggests, Dutchmen. From the town of Doorn in Holland, they arrived in America with Peter Stuyvesant (governor of "New Netherland") in 1647 and founded their own settlement in what became New York State.

Lew's great-grandfather moved to Philadelphia to build ships for Stephen Girard, one of the great civic and business leaders in the history of the city. The Van Dusens became grandees of nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Lew's grandfather Joseph, born in 1815, was a banker, coal owner and city councilman; his father, the youngest of Joseph's seventeen offspring, was appointed a judge of the Orphans' Court.

Lew himself was born in December 1910. He graduated summa cum laude from Princeton in 1932 and spent a year at Harvard Law School before setting off as a Rhodes Scholar to Oxford, where he took a first in the



Bachelor of Civil Laws post-graduate degree — and, besides mastering the skills of a rugby three-quarter, claimed to have played cricket against (T.E.) Lawrence of Arabia. It was at Oxford also that he proposed to Maria ("Mia") Peper Whelan, while Charles Villiers

distracted his future mother-in-law's attention by walking her round New College garden. Lew and Mia were married in November 1935.

By then, having breezed through the Pennsylvania Bar exam, he had joined the Philadelphia law firm of Drinker, Biddle & Reach. He rose to national distinction in the law and a highly respected position in the life of the city which Scotty calls "the biggest small town in America". But before that, Lew also had a busy war, and an interlude in London as a NATO diplomat.

Lew saw action with the US army in North Africa and Normandy and was for a time Assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Allied Military Government in Sicily and Southern Italy. Shortly after he first landed in Algiers, he bumped into Charles Villiers in the street. Villiers was on a mission from his SOE base at Bari in Italy; the two had not seen each other since Oxford, and Lew was glad to find his friend's face virtually unscarred after the plastic surgery. "The two of us joined forces and immediately headed for the top of a hill where we sat and talked for hours." Villiers spoke particularly of "how he proposed to change his life when the war was over." It is sometimes said in BAP circles that Van Dusen and Villiers fought together during the war; that is not so, though they saw each other again from time to time during the Allied advance through Italy.



As a lieutenant colonel at the end of the war, Lew was Assistant Chief of Staff of the US XXI Corps in Eastern Germany, where his task was to hand over 450,000 displaced persons and large areas of territory to the Russian army. He then returned to Philadelphia and the law, but in 1950 he was recalled to service as deputy to General Charles Spofford, the first US representative to NATO. Lew became executive director of NATO's American staff, with the rank of Minister.

NATO was initially based in London (it later moved to Paris, then Brussels), where the Van Dusens made their home in Hays Mews, Mayfair, within walking distance of the Villiers in Chester Square. Lew's task was to help establish the infrastructure of the 12-nation alliance which had been formed by the Washington treaty the previous year. Henry Sawyer, another Philadelphia lawyer who served on the NATO staff, wrote later that "the State Department has never been the same since... When the problem was getting another NATO nation to do something, Lew contrived a most extraordinary and novel approach previously unknown in the annals of the State Department: he directly asked them."

Lew returned to his legal practice in 1952, and rapidly made a name for himself in the profession. He was Chancellor in 1968 of the Philadelphia Bar Association (which captioned a photograph of him in its journal, "Lewis H Van Dusen Jr: force and subtlety"). He was also chairman of the ethics committee of the American Bar Association, and his dedication to the highest standards of legal practice won him, in 1997, the Michael Franck medal of the ABA.

Lew was also, said Isadore Scott, "always a tireless worker for Philadelphia". He was a director of the Greater Philadelphia Movement and a trustee of many local institutions, including the Academy of Natural Sciences where he first came to know Dr Ruth Patrick — who became his second wife in 1995, after Mia's death in March 1994.

Lew and Scotty first met in the 1950s. As Scotty recalls it, both were on the board of SEPTA, the South-east Pennsylvania Transport Authority, where Lew was particularly effective in standing up against the Democratic city government. It was, said Scotty, "one of the great joys of my life to have him as a friend."

**Scotty: "still tasting that tea"**

Though Scotty took on the role of spokesman for BAP's founders in later years he was careful to defer to Lew, and to Lew's relationship with Villiers, in talking about the Project's early years. The Scotts met Villiers at Van Dusen dinner parties in Philadelphia, and Scotty sometimes played golf with him — Lew preferred tennis. But Scotty's key contribution to the foundation of the BAP was, as Lew said, "putting his shoulder to the wheel" to secure funding for the first conferences and to help establish a selection procedure for the first US delegates. The Scotts' life, a classic American family story, also deserves telling.



Scotty's father, David Skot, was a Ukrainian Jew who worked his passage to Baltimore in the late 1890s. Within days of arriving, he took the new spelling of his surname from a sign for Scott St in Baltimore, and found a job cleaning theatres at night. He married a seamstress who had been a child labourer in garment sweatshops and whose family had arrived from the Baltic states.

The couple moved to Wilcoe in the mining area of west Virginia — where Scotty was born in November 1912 — and opened a country store. It was "an unusual place", says Scotty. "There was no breakdown between Catholic, Protestants and Jews. There were black lawyers with white clients. There wasn't the separatism you noticed in the cities."

As a young man, Scotty very much wanted to go to school in England, but he narrowly missed winning a Rhodes scholarship and could not afford to pay for the voyage himself. Instead, he studied law at Washington and Lee University, and practiced law briefly in Richmond, Virginia before embarking on a business career.

He had been commissioned as a reserve lieutenant in 1934, and in 1942, after Pearl Harbour, he was called up in the 141st infantry. Like Lew, he served first in North Africa, then in Italy. His first contact with British troops was on September 9, 1943, during the landing at Salerno in Italy. His own landing craft was disabled and in a dangerous position; a British vessel took his platoon aboard and took them to shore. Six days later... "My colonel told me to go over and make contact with the British unit on our left. It was just daybreak and I went over, and there were half a dozen men sitting around a tank having tea. They all greeted me very warmly and said "Come on, have breakfast with us". All I can tell you is I can still taste that cup of tea."

As the Allies advanced northwards through Italy, Scotty worked in the British-American headquarters as a major — though with a full colonel's responsibilities — on the staff of General Mark Clark, commander-in-chief of the 15th Army group. "I had a wonderful relationship with the Brits all the way through," Scotty says. "I loved it, and it may be presumptuous of me to say so, but they loved me and we had a great time together. We worked as one unit. We ate together, we lived together. In order to have it that way there has to be a mutuality of interest. We were all getting shot at by the same guys. I could never then, nor can I now, get over the way the British conducted themselves under the most adverse circumstances. Some of those guys had been fighting for five years; that was some story of perseverance and dedication."

Scotty had married, in 1943, Joan Rosenwald, a grand-daughter of Julius Rosenwald, the founder of the Sears company in Chicago; her father opened the first Sears store in Philadelphia. Returning from the war, he built up a business in fibreglass mouldings, Winner Industries, which he later sold. He became chairman of Tosco, an oil shale business, and director of a number of other companies.

At the same time, "I always had a yen to do something in the field of public service, sort of a repayment for what this country had done for my family and me. This wasn't any high-sounding effort on my part, I just felt that's what I wanted to do." At one time there was a possibility of a State Department job, and President Eisenhower tried to persuade Scotty to go into politics. Instead he served for fifteen years as chairman of Philadelphia's "tri-institutional" medical facilities — a difficult balancing act between the University of Pennsylvania, the city authorities and its childrens' hospital — and was a trustee of a great number of other philanthropic projects.

### **"Joan tapped her glass..."**

Scotty and Charles Villiers did know each other well, but they had in common experience of business, soldiering and public service, an admiration for each others' countries and a great affection for Lew Van Dusen. These strands of the three men's lives were drawn together at a dinner party in Villiers's honour at the Van Dusen's house in 1983. Travelling with Villiers was his old friend Lord Aldington, a former soldier, Conservative minister and industrialist. The Scotts were there, and so was another Anglophile Philadelphian and sportsman, Bill Linglebach — who had preceded Lew as a Rhodes scholar, played soccer for Arsenal, and persuaded Lew to go to Oxford.

Villiers, sitting next to Joan Scott, talked to her about the way in which his friendship with Lew had created a wider network of friendships, about his concern that the same kind of friendships were not being created in the younger generation, and about his discussions about BAP with Butler and Watt in London. In Scotty's account, familiar to BAP Delegates of the '90s when the Scotts and Van Dusens were regular conference participants, "Joan tapped her glass and asked everyone to listen to what Charles was saying..."

The conversation turned swiftly to the question of funding a first conference. Scotty immediately suggested an approach to an old and close friend of his, Robert Smith, who was president and CEO of the Pew Charitable Trusts and of the Glenmede Trust Company which manages them. Scotty (who had to leave on a business trip the next morning) called Smith there and then, and arranged for Villiers and Van Dusen to visit Smith's office the following day. Van Dusen later also made contact with an influential member of the Pew board of trustees, Robert Dunlap.

These initiatives resulted in due course in grants totalling \$460,000, which funded the first three BAP conferences. To many Americans, the name of Pew would come to mind first as a major sponsor of National Public Radio and environmental projects; in Britain, Pew is unknown, except to the very limited extent that left-wing journalists searching for reasons to be suspicious of the BAP have discovered that Pew money has supported conservative think tanks and pressure groups, such as the Heritage Foundation in Washington and the Manhattan Institute in New York. For the record, therefore, here are some facts about Pew.

### **Pew and the preservation of liberty**

Joseph N. Pew was the founder in 1886 of Sun Oil Co, one of the few substantial competitors to John D Rockefeller's Standard Oil. Between 1948 and 1979 Joseph's four children established one of America's biggest charitable foundations. It consists of seven trusts, whose combined assets amounted by 1997 to \$4.5 billion, providing grants of some \$180 million per year in the fields of health, the environment, education, the arts, religion and, through the J. Howard Pew Freedom Trust, public policy. The objectives of the latter are nowadays stated as being simply "to advance and sustain improvements in America's democratic life". But Howard Pew himself, a deeply religious man who died in 1971, was more forthright about the purpose of his endowment: it was, he declared, to "fight for the preservation of liberty" as well as to "acquaint the American people with

the values of a free market... the evils of bureaucracy... the paralysing effects of government controls... [and] the false promises of Socialism..."

Those words were written in the 1950s or '60s: as one BAP Fellow put it, "things were different back then". In later years, the J. Howard Pew Trust funded democracy initiatives in former Comecon countries, and work on the ethics of political campaign funding. According to Pew executive David Morse, it attracted criticism from both left and right for its choice of causes.

In 1983, said Robert Smith (who later served on BAP's US Advisory Board), the BAP proposal was "quite unusual" for Pew, because in those days almost all the trusts' work was domestic rather than international. Smith himself — whom Scotty characterised as "a liberal-minded Eisenhower Republican" — had family connections with England and immediately saw the value of the proposal, but "I had no idea how I was going to persuade the board". Astute salesmanship by Scotty and Lew helped the pitch. Were the Pew trustees sold on the idea of a transatlantic network of personal friendships, or by the opportunity to spread Howard Pew's gospel to Britain? "All of the above," Smith recalls. "Both aspects were important."

Smith agreed to take the application forward on condition that it had the backing of a reputable US institution, and it was Robert Dunlap who suggested an approach to Dean George S. Packard, a noted expert on Japan who was head of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC. In February 1984, Butler, the Vlielands and Coker flew to Washington again and put their case in person to the heads of the Pew Foundation and SAIS. Discussions continued until in October that year, when the proposal was finally approved in detail, and funding was offered for three years.

### **Towards the first conference**

The British-American Project for the Successor Generation — as it was known until the latter phrase was dropped in the early 1990s — was at last about to take wing. A first gathering of the British and American founders took place at the Goring, a London hotel much favoured by Philadelphians, and the first formal board meeting took place at the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall. Preparations began in earnest for the first BAP conference, which was to take place at Middle Aston in Oxfordshire in October 1985.

For obvious geographical reasons, different selection processes for BAP delegates were adopted on either side of the Atlantic from the very beginning. On the British side, the board chaired by Villiers — and strengthened by the addition of Labour politician George (now Lord) Robertson (later Secretary of State for Defence and secretary-general of NATO), Liberal politician Richard Holme (later Lord Holme of Cheltenham), and Admiral Sir James Eberle, the successor to David Watt as director of Chatham House — assembled its own list of candidates. On the US side, a more elaborate structure was required to find suitable people from all over the country. Nick Butler paid particular tribute to George Packard for his energetic leadership in this respect.

In 20 US cities, civic and business leaders with an interest in transatlantic affairs were asked to chair nominating committees. Through this network, 1,000 potential US candidates were identified, and whittled down to 125 nominees. The 125 were pre-screened by a committee of SAIS faculty members — including George Crowell, who became a 1987 Fellow of the Project. The final selection was made by Lew, Scotty, Dean Packard and SAIS program director Philip Yasinski.

The proceedings of the first conference are recorded in a report edited by Christopher Coker and published jointly by Chatham House and SAIS, under the title *US-British Relations: Common Bonds and Common Burdens*. There were 22 Delegates from each side of the Atlantic. Unlike later BAP conferences, in which the entire assembly — sometimes divided into new Delegates and past Fellows — concentrates on one chosen theme, the first BAP participants divided into smaller groups for the duration of the conference to discuss topics within their own particular fields.



Thus Joshua Gotbaum, then an associate at Lazard Freres in New York, chaired a group which debated economic affairs, including world trade, interest rates, currency stability and debt rescheduling. Paul Schulte of the Ministry of Defence chaired discussions on East-West relations, arms control and the challenge of international terrorism; Houston lawyer Carol Dinkins led a group which looked at “The Individual in Society”, and Nick Butler’s team examined “Work and Technology”.

But what emerges most strongly from the report is the strength of personal interaction and contrast which has characterised every BAP conference since, and which makes them such a compelling way to pass four days. The American side had more “doers”, noted Charles Villiers, but the British more “thinkers”. Yet the British were by no means underachievers: they included Stephen Dorrell, a future Conservative cabinet minister, and the broadcaster Trevor Phillips, a leading figure in Britain’s black community who later chaired the Equality and Human Rights Commission.



But still the British group was marked out by “a certain diffidence, a lack of style, a concern to be as ‘laid back’ as possible, an unwillingness to admit to ambition”, wrote one of their number, Rabbi (now Baroness) Julia Neuberger. The Americans, she found, were “terrifying, brilliant, hard young achievers...”



The British were much more in need of the Americans than the Americans of the British... ‘We thought you would have done much more,’ was the American cry. ‘We cannot believe that you have done so much so young,’ replied the Brits.”

Among the Americans who created this impression were the ABC News correspondent Karen Burnes, the entrepreneur James Binns, and two distinguished African-Americans, Oakland city manager Henry Gardner and Michael Lomax, a power in the Atlanta Democratic party who later became president of Dillard University, New Orleans. Meanwhile, contrary to the expectations of some Delegates, politics and security issues in their more bare-knuckled form seem barely to have got a look in, even though the Middle Aston conference centre was literally within earshot of the controversial US Air Force base at Upper Heyford.

“I was amazed at the relatively low degree of interest apparent in current British and American politics,” wrote George Packard. “One could barely hear the names of Thatcher and Reagan in the various dialogues, and there seemed to be no disposition to connect the discussion of social and economic reform to political action.”

## **Energy and momentum**

With the ending of the first successful BAP encounter came plans for a second one, in Lew and Scotty's home-town of Philadelphia. Perhaps the chief significance of the 1986 conference was that, with the arrival of a second intake of 42 Delegates, the pattern of annual renewal was established which gives the Project its special energy and momentum. The British group included Chris (now Lord) Smith, who was to become Secretary of State for Culture in the 1997 Labour cabinet, and the theatre-owner Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen, who became chairman of the BAP executive committee and played a major part in the Project's subsequent development. Among the Americans was Colonel Ray Winkel Jr, a physicist from the US Military Academy at West Point. Unlike 1985, the political debate in Philadelphia became heated, Winkel recalls, "but it was mostly the Brits arguing with each other, Liberals versus Conservatives, with the Americans refereeing".

Each BAP conference is quite different, in subject matter and venue, in the cross-section of its participants and the heat that they generate. Yet in certain ways, the experience of taking part is very much the same from one year to the next, and all the more valuable for that. Removed from the consensual surroundings of normal working life, participants are challenged to explain their values and expertise to people whose experience and world-view is quite different from their own. The friendships created at BAP conferences prompt self-questioning rather than complacency; Fellows have a rare opportunity to re-examine their own role and national identity through the eyes of others.

Sir James Eberle of Chatham House summed up the essence of the BAP experience in his final thoughts on the 1985 conference. He began by setting it in the context of world events of the day: the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and the first Reagan-Gorbachev summit, violence in South Africa, the continuing threat of terrorism, tensions with Libya.

Whilst all this had played a part in conference discussions, he wrote, "perhaps the most interesting and encouraging outcome of these three days was the emphasis... on the influence of personal values in the development of our two societies, and in our development as individuals within those societies. It was fascinating to see the extent to which the two national groups seemed to represent almost an archetypal sub-set of the very different national characteristics of the two countries. And yet, despite those differences, it was clearly apparent that there was a true sense of a common bond, and a genuine wish to explore further the nature of that bond."



## The false history

For most BAP Fellows, Eberle's words will provide a very adequate summary of the continuing spirit of the Project, and a fitting end to this account of the Project's beginnings. But it is still necessary to address a curious reinvention of BAP history which gained some currency in the British left-wing press in the 1990s and has found a permanent home on the internet. The essence of this myth is that the BAP came into existence because of a US foreign policy interest in capturing the hearts and minds of the up-and-coming British socialists who became, in due course, 'New Labour'.

Many BAP Delegates down the years have wondered whether there was some governmental impulse behind the BAP, but — to the disappointment of those who like conspiracy theories — nothing of the kind has ever been uncovered, or even hinted at by those who might be in a position to know. Such suspicions were given new life, however, by a 1997 article by Tom Easton in *Lobster* (an obscure, anti-American news-sheet) highlighting the number of senior Labour politicians who had by then become BAP Fellows. Easton also strove to connect the founding of BAP with a White House meeting in March 1983 at which President Ronald Reagan, commenting on rising opposition to the siting of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Britain, called for the encouragement of a "successor generation".

The theme was taken up by two of Britain's most unreconstructed left-wing writers, Paul Foot (nephew of the former Labour leader Michael Foot) and John Pilger. Foot, in *Private Eye*, equated the BAP to "CIA front organisations" set up in the 1960s "to promote 'sensible' elements in British Labour". Pilger, in the *New Statesman* and in his book *Hidden Agendas*, described the White House meeting as BAP's "launch ceremony", and applied his vitriol to various journalist BAP Fellows who, in his view, had failed to realise that they were being manipulated for US propaganda purposes.

Is there the slightest substance to any of this? It is true that Nick Butler originally thought of the Project as a way of putting Labour people like himself in touch with American ideas — but on economic and social issues, rather than on missile deployment and the death of communism. It is true, according to Robert Smith, that the Pew trustees saw their funding of the Project partly in terms of spreading an all-American gospel to Britain. And it is true that Charles Villiers moved in the inner circles of the old Tory (but not new Thatcherite) Establishment. Beyond that, however, the plot rapidly falls apart.

There is no record or substantial rumour of any government involvement in the promotion of the Project beyond polite contacts with the embassies in London and Washington and the provision of £1,000 by the US embassy for the first fact-finding trip in 1983. There were well-connected people on either side — Walter Annenberg, the former US ambassador to London, was one and, according to Lew, Lord Aldington was another — who took the view that the Project was fundamentally un-necessary, because the Anglo-American relationship was as good as it ever had been at the levels that mattered.

And there is no connection whatever between the Project and the 1983 White House meeting: “That’s the first I’ve ever heard of it,” said Scotty in 1998, “And I think I would have remembered.” The phrase “successor generation” was, in Nick Butler’s recollection, becoming common at the time to describe the post-war generation then emerging into public life: “successor generation programs” were to be found in various fields at American colleges.

If the BAP really had been designed as a propaganda vehicle, it would have been judged a complete failure. All the founders agreed from the earliest stage that delegate selection should be broadly based and eclectic, and that the participants themselves should largely determine the conference agendas.

The first British delegation was not dominated by Labour activists, but there is no secret why a dozen of the most able of them joined the Project in subsequent years: Butler nominated them, or they successively nominated each other. The American delegate list was not notably right-wing in the first year or in any other year. It is in fact a complete misrepresentation of the nature of the Project to try to analyse its membership in those terms; as George Packard wrote, that kind of politics is barely discussed.

And once it had acquired a critical mass of Fellows plus salaried project directors on both sides of the Atlantic and a variety of funding sources including contributions from Fellows themselves, BAP became a wholly independent, self-supporting organisation — the ties with both Chatham House and SAIS in due course coming to an end.

The “plot” was, in fact, no more than wishful thinking by a small number of virulently anti-American journalists: “utter fantasy,” according to Nick

Butler. The final word on the matter should rest with the American founders who were better placed than anyone to know the truth of the matter, having raised the funding for the first conferences.

“Let me make a very clear statement: there was no hidden agenda on this, none whatsoever,” Scotty said in 1998, with a touch of irritation. “This was an effort to restore what we saw as a breakdown in the personal relationships that had marked out the previous generation. Something had to be done to restore that English-speaking relationship. The fact is there’s a great warmth between the people’s for so many reasons. We think alike in so many ways.”

“I’m a simple country boy who started in a one-room school. I’m asserting a love for Britain that’s no different today than it was 30 or 50 years ago, and I assure you there’s no hidden agenda to that, it’s a matter of appreciation of past history. Anybody trying to relate the creation of BAP to any Cold War stimuli is barking up the wrong tree, at least in my opinion. Absolutely in my recollection this was to do with personal relationships just like Lew and Charles had, just to have that base so that you could call at any time and say, hey, I’m thinking about doing this, maybe you can help...”

### **Postscript**

Lew Van Dusen died aged 93 in 2004, having addressed his last BAP conference at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, in 2000; his wife Ruth Patrick continued her work as one of America’s leading natural scientists until she had passed 100, and died aged 105 in 2013. Isadore Scott died in 2008, a month short of his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday and two years after the death of his wife Joan. The Van Dusen, Villiers and Scott families were all represented at BAP’s 25th anniversary dinner at Philadelphia in 2010 — at which Dr George Packard was a speaker and a recording was played of the interview with Scotty quoted above.

During the 1990s, the role of these elder statesmen in the creation of BAP perhaps came to be overstated: it was BAP folklore in those years that the moment when “Joan tapped her glass...” was the actual conception of the Project. That was what Lew and Scotty themselves believed, and they retold the story at successive conferences. Since their passing — though they are remembered with warmth and gratitude by the many Fellows who knew them — the perspective of BAP history has been readjusted to give proper recognition to the preparatory work of the younger British founders.

At BAP's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 2015, hosted by Ambassador Matthew Barzun at his official residence, Winfield House in London, the principal speaker was Nick Butler — who had moved on from BP to become chairman of the Cambridge Centre for Energy Studies and a visiting professor at Kings College London, and who modestly expressed surprise at the breadth, buzz and intellectual energy of the organisation to which he and his cohort gave birth.



*Fellows and Delegates at BAP's Houston conference, November 2016: attendees included eight Fellows of more than 25 years standing.*

Martin Vander Weyer, 1994 BAP Fellow  
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