

TUESDAY 4 OCTOBER 1994

## Harry Hodgkinson

HARRY HODGKINSON was a great as editor of the Liberal campaign Balkanist and friend of Albania, and a manifesto, but soon returned to the distinguished travel writer. In a long Navy and took charge of the Yugoslav and varied life he was also an and Albanian desk for Naval intelligence officer, Liberal Party Intelligence. He was closely involved ideologue and oil company executive. in the protracted political controversy

He was born of strong Liberal and legal proceedings that followed farming stock in Lancashire, and the Corfu Channel incident in October showed early academic promise, 1946 when Royal Navy ships were winning a scholarship at the age of blown up by mines between Corfu nine to Kirkham Grammar School, and the Albanian coast.

After leaving school at the age of 16, Hodgkinson left the Navy in 1955 he became a cub reporter on a local and joined Shell-Mex, in charge of newspaper, then graduated to the business intelligence, and acted as *Blackpool Times*, which he later Secretary for the UK Petroleum described as "a decrepit newspaper Advisory Committee. In the same founded by my great-uncle as a year, he published *The Adriatic Sea*, Liberal witness in Tory Blackpool". one of the finest travel books of the After it went bankrupt in 1933, he period, a distillation of over 20 years' joined the *Bradford Telegraph* until travel, wartime, and intelligence moving to London in 1937 for a full-experience. It is much more than a time job at the Liberal Party travel book, more a reflection on a beloved country in the tradition of an headquarters.

But Hodgkinson's horizons were Edith Durham or a Patrick Leigh wider than those of many of his Fermor, full of brilliant observation contemporaries, and he became an mediated by deep learning, love of the obsessive traveller in all the Balkan sea, and inner passion for landscapes countries. In 1936 he walked from described.

Charing Cross to Damascus Gate in After his retirement in 1972 he Jerusalem. He visited the Albania of devoted most of his time to the Anglo-King Zog in 1937, fell in love with Albanian Association, acting as a the country immediately, and joined generous friend and adviser in the Anglo-Albanian Association on countless refugee cases with people his return to England. on the run from Enver Hoxha's

As a result, he met the great pio- dictatorship in Albania, then later, neering ethnologist Edith Durham, from Serbian occupation of the author of *The Struggle for Scutari* Republic of Kosovo in former (1904) and *High Albania* (1909), then Yugoslavia. Hodgkinson was a warm, in the final years of her life, and hospitable and cheerful man, with a began to form social and political sharp wit, and he consistently contacts with Albanians, and the encouraged the younger generation in Albanian government itself, that were London, even when he did not share to prove invaluable to the British their views. People from every government in the post-war period. background found a visit to his tiny, Hodgkinson's basic outlook on Balkan gloomy, bookladen house tucked politics was formed at this time, and away near Regent's Park a memorable throughout his life he fought for the experience, with the inevitable Albanian cause and took up strong smoked salmon sandwiches and anti-Serb and anti-Bulgarian posi- large glasses of Isle of Jura malt. tions. He was part of the circle of He had foreseen the disintegration King Zog when he fled to London, of Yugoslavia long before the foreign and of his exiled court near policy establishment in Britain, and Pangbourne in the Thames valley. was not slow to point out the years of

On the outbreak of the Second fatal ignorance of Balkan realities in World War Hodgkinson first joined official circles that has led to so many the Palace of Westminster Home tragic policy errors. Although strongly Guard, then the Navy in 1942 after a pro-Europe personally, he had no course in wireless telegraphy. With illusions about the role of the Eu- the collapse of Mussolini's regime in ropean Community in the Balkan Italy he was transferred to Special crisis, or the fatal complacency the Operations Executive in the Adriatic Maastricht process had engendered in at Bari HQ, and operated in Foreign Office thinking about the Yugoslavia and Albania during and region.

after the German occupation, and was In the last year of his life he was mentioned in despatches. He returned working towards the unification of the to England for a short period before disparate groups of Albanianists in the 1945 General Election and acted Britain, a task he considered urgent in



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order to assist the struggle for the freedom of Kosovo, a cause that was perhaps closest to his heart of any that he supported. He bore his last illness with characteristic humour, dignity and stoicism, his final instruction to his friends being to bring him adequate quantities of champagne to speed his passing.

**James Pettifer**

*Harry Hodgkinson, writer, journalist, businessman, Albanianist: born Kirkham, Lancashire 15 March 1913; married 1941 Tessa McKenzie (died 1942), 1947 Marie Elizabeth Howorth (died 1983; one daughter); died London 2 October 1994.*