

Night the PM was nearly kidnapped by Scots students

(But he kept his cool, and his liberty, by providing them all with free beer)

By Sam Greenhill

AN extraordinary plot by a group of Left-wing Scottish students to kidnap Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home in 1964 has been revealed for the first time.

Amazingly, they nearly succeeded in snatching the Conservative premier because he did not have a single bodyguard with him at the time.

In the bungled caper, revealed in previously-secret diaries, the quick-thinking Prime Minister managed to stall his would-be kidnappers by offering them beer.

Yesterday, The Daily Mail tracked down some of the conspirators and found that, 44 years later, there are still arguments over who was to blame.

The massive security breach is unthinkable today but in April 1964 all the students did was knock on the front door of a house in Aberdeenshire where the PM was staying.

There had been no room for his bodyguard - who had gone off to find a bed for the night in Aberdeen - so Sir Alec was alone and unguarded when they arrived.

The farcical kidnap tale was related years later by Sir Alec himself, during a shooting party at Birkhall on Royal Deeside.

One of those present was Lord Hailsham - who was Lord Chancellor in the Heath and Thatcher governments - who made a note of it in his diary entry for January 9, 1977. It began: 'An odd story of the 1964 election never published.'

Lord Hailsham requested that his diaries remain unpublished during his lifetime. But they were given to the University of Cambridge's Churchill Archives Centre after his death in 2001 and are now being published online by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

The kidnap prank took place after the Prime Minister, who had just announced there would be an election in October, appeared at a Scottish Unionist conference.

A group of Aberdeen University students led by Sandy Carle, chairman of the student union's charity committee, approached Sir Alec and asked him to sign a forfeit for charity



Judith Carle: 'Always doing stunts'



Lord Hailsham: Notes in his diary

in return for not kidnapping him. He paid £1, signed, and assumed it was all in good fun.

Afterwards, he drove eight miles in heavy fog to nearby Potterton House, near Aberdeen, the home of his hosts John and Priscilla Tweedsmuir.

Unknown to him - not to mention his police escort - about 20 student pranksters were on his tail, with the intention of staging an accident as a means of stopping his car. But the student appointed the task

'He posed for photographs'

got lost in the fog and Sir Alec made it to Potterton House without incident.

There the police escort left him, at which point the students launched Plan B - walking up to the house and ringing the bell. To their astonishment, it was opened by Sir Alec himself.

Lord Hailsham recorded in his diary: 'Alec (then PM) was staying with John and Priscilla Tweedsmuir, who had no room for Alec's private bodyguard,

who had decamped to Aberdeen.

'The deputation declared they were going to kidnap Alec.

'The PM stalled them by asking for ten minutes to pack a bag, then posed for photographs with the students and finally offered them beer, which they accepted.'

Lord Hailsham continued: 'John & Priscilla returned and the kidnap project abandoned. The bodyguard swore Alec to secrecy as his job would have been in peril.'

Yesterday Chris Collins, of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, who worked on the Hailsham diaries project, said: 'The Home kidnap prank was one of the worst breaches of a Prime Minister's personal security in the 20th century. If Home's assailants had been darker in purpose, he could have died that night.'

As it was, the students merely intended to take Sir Alec to a house in Aberdeen for a few hours then release him.

It was the latest in a series of outlandish stunts by the university's charities committee. A few weeks earlier, they had kidnapped local TV pre-

sender Grahame Roberts, who missed a news bulletin - but it raised £50.

There was still debate yesterday about who to blame for the attempt to snatch the Prime Minister.

At his home in Aberdeen, retired GP Ron Grant, 64, who was president of the student union at the time, said: 'There was a charity committee which would plan events and do things properly.'

'There were other groups, mainly made up of engineering students, who were a bit like an offshore terrorist wing. They would just come up with an idea on a whim and get on with it. They did some crazy things.'

Mr Carle went on to be a solicitor and died ten years ago aged 58. His widow Judith, who was also on the charity committee, said: 'We were always doing publicity stunts to raise money. We all thought it was very innocent.'

The Hailsham diaries cover Edward Heath's time as PM from 1970-74 and are believed to be the only ones in existence from any senior member of his Cabinet.



First contact: Sandy Carle with Sir Alec Douglas-Home at Aberdeen in 1964 just hours before the abduction attempt

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