APW

A redraft by JPW of the new DNB entry
by Professor Chapman of Durham Univ. for
Sir Percival Waterfield KBE CB.
This will have to be drastically pruned
but I think it useful for children and grandchildren.

Waterfield, Sir (Alexander) Percival (1888 – 1965), Civil Servant, was born on 16 May 1888 in Exeter, the younger of two sons of William Waterfield J.P. of Eastdon House, Starcross, S. Devon, formerly of the Bengal Civil Service, by his second wife Matilda Rose Herschel, the tenth child and eighth daughter of Sir J F W Herschel Bt (q.v.).

In 1920 he married Doris Mary (1895 – 1988), third daughter of the six children of Otto Siepmann (q.v.); they had two sons and two daughters. He was made CB in 1923, knighted in 1944 and made KBE in 1951. He died of heart failure, after a series of strokes, on 2 June 1965, at home in Sotwell, near Wallingford, Berkshire. His ashes are interred in the family vault in Cofton churchyard, S. Devon, where his parents and other relatives are also buried.

His was the fourth generation of his family in public service; many of his relatives served with distinction in the Indian Civil Service and Army, largely due to the influence of his grandfather Thomas Nelson Waterfield (1799 – 1865), Secretary of the Political and Intelligence Department of the India Board. A relative was the first officer to be killed in the Mutiny, and another the last. His father also served in the Mutiny. His paternal grandmother, Elizabeth née Benthall, came from a banking family in Totnes, and now of Benthall Hall in Shropshire, some of whom also served in India, notably Sir Edward Benthall KCSI (?q.v.).

Waterfield was educated at Mr Townsend's private school in Gloucestershire, at Westminster, where he was Captain of the School, and where a record number of Waterfields were educated, and at Christ Church, Oxford (Head Westminster Scholar 1907). He was Hertford Scholar and *proxime accessit* Craven Scholar in 1909. He obtained 1st class in Classics (Mods) in 1909 and 1st class in Lit. Hum in 1911.

He entered the Treasury by competitive examination in 1911. He was rejected for military service in the War of 1914 – 18 due to bad sight, and continued in the Treasury. But in 1920 he left the Treasury to work as Economic Director of Peter Jones Ltd, at the invitation of Spedan Lewis, Chairman, who was a close friend from school at Westminster and remained so throughout his life. This experiment was, however, short-lived, and in the same year he was asked to serve in Dublin Castle under Sir John Anderson, and was advanced to acting Assistant Secretary, and later appointed Treasury Remembrancer in Ireland 1922-23. In Ireland he was, with his wife and infant son, ambushed by Sinn Fein, and narrowly rescued from being shot by the arrival of British soldiers. Among other achievements he was, as the official archives show, solely responsible for reaching a satisfactory and amicable solution, previously in dispute, for

the establishment of the Supreme Court of Northern Ireland in 1923. His CB at an unusually early age marked his outstanding contribution during the Troubles and on into Partition.

In 1938 he was appointed one of three members of the Palestine Partition Commission under Sir John Woodhead's chairmanship. In 1939/40 he was Deputy Secretary, second in command, of the war-time Ministry of Information, part-time, but gradually withdrew to take up his formal new appointment from 1939 as First Civil Service Commissioner, from which post he retired in 1951. He was awarded an honorary Ll. D by Ohio Wesleyan University in 1948.

In 1958 he was invited by the British and Maltese Governments to act as Commissioner to settle an unresolved dispute in the dockyards in the island about wages and conditions of work. The Secretary of the Cabinet, Sir Norman Brook, told him that this invitation was due to his reputation for "being a patient listener".

Waterfield's career, though in some ways that of a typical Treasury official of his time, was characterized by an untypical variety of experiences outside the Treasury. And he was unique in creating, as First Civil Service Commissioner, an entirely fresh method of personnel selection for the public service, to replace the previous system of written examinations only. As he wrote to his elder son, serving overseas in the Army, in 1945: "After five years away you and your contemporaries cannot be expected to sit public examinations to degree standard in specialist subjects." Under the new system candidates had to pass a certain level in a written examination of a general nature and arithmetic, and were then assessed over two days in group and individual tests by a psychiatrist and an experienced "observer", and given a psychometric test. The final stage was an intense and penetrating interview by a Board, under Waterfield's chairmanship, chosen from the Civil Service, Foreign Office, the Universities, industry and professional bodies, including normally a woman. In the creation and management of the Civil Service Selection Board, Waterfield demonstrated an innovative imagination (though he built on concepts developed originally by the Army for officer selection), and determination, coupled with meticulous attention to detail, as well as skill and courage in persuading the Treasury and other Government departments, especially an initially hostile Foreign Office, as well as universities and other outside bodies, of the need for his scheme to be adopted. This all became the subject of public controversy. Waterfield, unusually for a civil servant of that time, was willing to speak on his proposals when invited, and, even more unusually, he and his scheme were the subject of debate in the House of Lords on 26 May 1948, where Lord Cherwell was a fierce critic. But Waterfield's ideas prevailed, largely due to strong support from the Labour Government, especially Ernest Bevin, and the methods of selection developed under his leadership stood the test of time and have since influenced personnel selection methods elsewhere at home and abroad.

In physical terms Waterfield was of middle stature and build, of serious but kindly expression, and neat in his appearance. His courtesy and good manners were always remarked upon. Candidates at C.I.S.S.B interview may have found him initially rather formal, but many subsequently commented on his kind attention and patience. He was a devout member of the Church of England, and in retirement gave his time voluntarily to diocesan and parish finance. The losses he incurred in his personal inheritance from his

mother following the stock exchange crash of 1929, coupled with the heavy cost of private education for his children and on medical treatment during a series of family illnesses, caused him to move from Cobham in Surrey to a smaller house outside Guildford, and brought him anxiety over many years. Despite a highly developed sense of duty and consequentially long working hours over a long period, he was able to keep up loving and happy relations with his family. He and his wife were knowledgeable and creative gardeners. He also enjoyed chess (he played for Oxford University and the Athenaeum Club) especially in his final years with his elder grandson, and walking in the Swiss Alps on (albeit) infrequent holidays with his wife. He had most beautiful handwriting. He was unselfish of time and effort in helping relatives and others in need. He left an estate of £……, all to his wife.

JPW July 1998*

* typed by JTW Pas de Calais France July 1998