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The Times Diary: Tricky Dicky's pop at Reagan

Patrick Kidd

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Jonathan Aitken, biographer of Richard Nixon, gave the annual memorial lecture last week at the former president's library in California. Nixon was not noted for a sense of humour but Aitken recalled a rare joke from him the day after he and Ronald Reagan had both spoken at a banquet at Claridge's in 1992. Aitken told his subject over breakfast of his surprise that while Nixon had given a 45-minute address without notes, Reagan's brief introductory remarks needed a flunky holding up large prompts. They then saw Reagan leaving to speak at the Oxford Union, followed coincidentally by porters carrying a number of large rectangles wrapped in paper, which Aitken assumed were someone's purchases from an art gallery. A wolfish smile crept over Nixon's face. "Gee," he said, "those must be Reagan's cue cards for Oxford."

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