

# Good People in the Worthing Tax Hub

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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Worthing has a fine history of helping taxpayers send in the correct levies on income, estates, excise duties and whatever else parliament allows government to take from us.

Decades ago there was the mythical 11 plus question: Which was the odd one out: dog, cat and wireless? Less obviously, the cat because once a licence was required for a radio and for a dog.

In 2002, Sir Nick Montagu, then chairman of Inland Revenue, opened new offices in Worthing, completing a stage of the Sussex reorganisation. When I first served the Worthing West constituency, there was a local tax office by Worthing station, with two major establishments at Durrington, across the railway lines where then nearly 2,000 staff were with Lloyds TSB Registrars.

The benefits of digital transformation has been associated with significant change in office duties in public services and in the private sectors. It was important to the economy in our part of West Sussex that His Majesty's Revenue and Customs chose to build Teville Gate House for the Worthing Specialist Site.

On Tuesday I joined representatives of the 900 employees, with local school heads, for the official opening. We congratulated the designers and construction staff, together with the technology experts and office designers who made the preparations to help people to work together, serving most parts of HMRC in helping government revenues to be gathered in fairly and effectively.

The oldest part, the Inland Revenue, in 1665 (the year of London's plague) and just before the Great Fire, organised taxes introduced to pay for the Second Anglo-Dutch War, Within thirty years the new Board of Taxes administered the first land tax and imposts on houses, windows and dogs. Next came the Board of Stamps, raising funds on the sales of newspapers, lottery tickets, playing cards, gloves and medicines

Income tax started in 1797, becoming annual in 1842. Customs levies have a longer history: in 1203 King John's State Treasury was the collector. Quiz: What did Geoffrey Chaucer, Robert Burns and Dick Whittington have in common? Each was a Customs Officer.

Excise duties were charged on manufacturers of products including alcoholic drink and tobacco products. The Board of Excise merged the Boards of Taxes and of Stamps in 1849, as the Houses of Parliament were being rebuilt after the disastrous fire. After other changes, HM Revenue and Customs was created in 2005.

The responsible minister, the Financial Secretary, until last week was Andrew Griffith MP for Arundel and South Downs, now the Economic Secretary at the Treasury. He has brought competence and his serious approach to each of his recent posts.

I congratulate my neighbour Nick Gibb MP for again serving as Education Minister of State, with Gillian Keegan MP for Chichester as Secretary of State. I will be asking them to take action to avoid making worse the damaging overprovision of primary school places in West Durrington.

When speaking at the Tax Hub, I admitted that if I had done better at university, I could have applied to join the civil service as many in my family have. My supervisor Professor Sir James Mirrlees won the Nobel Prize for Economics. He showed why tax rates should not remain too high.

The CAMRA Campaign for Real Ale Beer Festival in the Guildbourne Centre was enjoyable; I went on Friday and Saturday. I agree with publicans and their customers that beer tax should be lower; also, I support proposals that GB wine producers should have concessions for farm gate sales.

When circumstances allow, let us bring tax rates down, after dealing fairly with the present difficult circumstances. Tax revenues rise with economic growth. Inappropriate tax rates can be harmful.