

Attributes, Abilities and Approach

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It is wrong in my opinion to argue that the benefits of higher education should be measured by an estimate of extra lifetime earnings. The starting pay for teachers is reasonable. Later increases may depend most on promotion and posts with extra responsibility. Our schools' successes depend as much on the teachers whose career is as a good class leader with a love for their subject. Newspapers depend on reporters and specialist writers whose earnings would not push up the average earnings of their fellow college or university graduates.

Minister in our religions and faiths seldom earn more than the living wage level or average earnings. They fulfil a role that demands much more than 9-5 employment. I am reminded of these truths by two Westminster windows I passed on Monday night after speaking on the potentially harmful impact of unjustified building proposal at St Andrew's Gardens that would change the nature of the Tarring village within Worthing and Persimmon's intended destruction of the green Goring Gap linking Ferring with the Ilex community and between the South Downs and the coast.

Behind one window is the carpenters' workshop where in 1959 I designed and constructed two large wall kitchen cabinets for the first home my parents owned. Decades later, the legendary estate agent Roy Brooks generously described them as craftsman built. That acknowledges the help from the carpenter. Many of the modern building apprentices trained at Northbrook, now MET, will gain in earnings and in ability though we should not judge them or the college by tax returns.

For every artist achieving commercial success, there are more who enjoy or endure the process of creativity without exceeding the tax threshold.

The second window is the Church House bookstore where the first book I looked at was 'Batting for the Poor', Andrew Bradstock's biography of David Shephard, the celebrated bishop and cricketer who played for Sussex and for England. We were friends. Grace Shephard and he entertained us in their home in Asylum Road where they lived after rejecting the grander bishop's house. At the table were clergy and non-clergy. Each did valuable work; few had above average earnings.

In June 1975 when I was first elected in Woolwich West, Father Michael Marshall was announced as the successor to David on the day Margaret Thatcher's reaction to my first election to the Commons was printed. Michael beat me to obtaining the news placard 'Maggie Over The Moon About Woolwich'; he overlooked the photograph of her Harvey Smith hand wave – she was then not used to Winston Churchill's palm-out Victory sign.

During the past week I have been interviewed by a variety of questioners. One is the New Statesman's Harry Lambert, a star writer who noticed that there is a gap of eight year to the election of the next longest serving Conservative MP. When introduced as Father of the House, I point out that the senior MP is Labour's Dame Margaret Beckett who had an involuntary gap: she was admired as interim leader of Labour. She reminds me of Lord (Chris) Patten's observation that long public and parliamentary service is aided greatly by a long-lasting spouse or partner: Margaret has had the admirable amiable Leo. Some MPs are older than me; others may look more worn.

This week a university researcher noted my continuous service locally, nationally and internationally. She asked for my summary. There is enough success and some fun. The important causes and campaigns where I may fail are important; that is why it is right to battle on, trying to improve and to protect the lives of everyone.