

Doing Good, Having Fun and Failing Often

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald Article

20th June 2019

Girls and boys from Summerlea Community primary school in Rustington came to Westminster. We had a lovely time together, exploring the purposes of politics, remembering the importance of avoiding unnecessary civil war or international conflict, helping people to be self-reliant when possible and giving full help when it is needed. We also played a few maths games; it is impressive when a bright child sees through a conundrum with clarity.

Also, this week I walked a group of American friends around the Palace of Westminster. The art in Portcullis House, the new building, includes a grotesque caricature by Gerald Scarfe of the Commons chamber 700 years after Simon de Montfort's short life parliament in 1265. There is the 1986 painting of the Commons with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister addressing the house. The Lords library corridor holds a painting of the Lords in 1995: the Baroness Thatcher is sitting in a prominent position.

Grayson Perry, the notable contemporary artist and ceramicist, has his Print for a Politician on display. It illustrates his dissection of British "prejudices, fashions and foibles". He has said: 'I was thinking of all the bickering that's been going on in the world and what fun it would be to label everybody socially. I made a long list of all the different groups I could think of off the top of my head and scattered them randomly on the surface. There are minimalists, chauvinist pigs, elitists, parents, fat people, townies, locals, the old, Sunnis, Shias, fantasists, working class, thick people, satanists. Everything. It shows that we can live with this difference.'

On Tuesday a past pupil of Durrington high school came to experience Parliament. The Commons had health questions and exchanges on civilians in Syria, EU/British Citizen's rights, the situation in Hong Kong and domestic energy efficiency plans. We agreed minor changes to Church of England procedures. Back in 1928 the Commons shockingly failed to approve the Book of Common Prayer. By the way, it is not certain that The King James's Bible, 1611, was actually authorised. Some Privy Council records were destroyed by fire.

We gave two hours to the Home Affairs Select Committee hearings considering whether the police had made real improvements twenty years after the Stephen Lawrence inquiry headed by Sir William Macpherson. Two of his advisers, John Sentamu who is now Archbishop of York and Dr Richard Stone OBE who has also been a lifelong anti-racist campaigner are people I am glad to count as friends.

At a gathering in Lambeth Palace on Church Action on Poverty, the Archbishop filled a gap by saying he had spotted me and that were the Romans still here, they would say Veni, Vidi, Velcro: 'Peter turns up, notices things and sticks to tasks'.

From before Stephen was targeted in a fatal attack in my earlier constituency, I would ask when the colour of skin would be no more important than colour of eyes or of hair. I still ask. Many of my successes and too many of my failures have been with cases of unfair treatment of people who are black or Asian, now BME. I hope that the Select Committee allows me to give evidence, especially about the recent shocking police treatment of Gurpal Viridi, the former exemplary Sikh sergeant.

The last time I helped a Select Committee was on reforming law and practices relating to residential leaseholders. That worked: see the influential report. Watch this space. Often failure can be turned into achievement. Never give up is the advice I would give to pupils.