

Tribute to a Great Newspaper Man

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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Why become involved in public service as a member of parliament? You can do good; you can have fun; you can fail when attempting an important challenge; you can have some success to show an injustice that can be a lifeline to one or many.

There are other occupations with a similar mix of results. Newspapers, perhaps? For decades I have admired Sir Ray Tindle, described as the ever-optimistic newspaper proprietor who ran a debt-free business, kept overheads low and who believed all news is local.

At Brixton Hill and approaching the steep approach to the South Downs, I knew it was my opportunity to help by getting out, reducing weight and being able to lend a shoulder. The one-cylinder engine just about powered us up the first big hill. At the second, he explained that as co-sponsor he allowed himself the help of a tractor.

Sir Ray was a director of Guardian Newspapers for nearly 20 years. He may have been the only media magnate honoured during John Major's time as prime minister. He cared for the unemployed, developing ten sets of enterprise business centres at little or no rent where they could try to turn an idea into a business.

When teased about articles submitted by local people, he defended using freelancers and local writers, saying "If you are the secretary of the cricket club, you are the best person to report the score last Saturday". He continued: "Local papers will survive. Local news in depth is what people need. Names, faces and places."

We have seen this illustrated frequently around us. The Worthing Herald and Littlehampton Gazette series was vital in the campaigning to save the Worthing hospitals, together with St Richards in Chichester and the services at Southlands. There were 6,000 people rallying at one support meeting, then 8,000 at the next, because the local newspaper reporters and editor did their jobs well.

In recent weeks, we have benefitted by coverage of the Goring Gap planning controversy. That has shown the power of media to bring people together and, if justified, to report on a significant local event.

Editors can judge what matters, what is interesting and what is true. One of my campaigns has been aiding mobility for people with wheelchairs or buggies. Claudia Flanders, well-known in Rustington, became expert at travelling with her entertaining husband Michael Flanders. She is among those who made me aware of barriers to use of public transport.

One result was my hope when Minister in Transport in 1987, that by 2000, each London taxi should be able to accommodate a normal size chair with its user. We then started on rail stations. Durrington needs attention. A wheelchair user might set off in one direction, returning to the opposite platform, a road journey of nearly a mile back to the side where their car might be.

I have submitted an initial recommendation that Durrington Station receive investment under the Access For All Funding process for 2023. There should be opportunity for local residents and community groups to bolster this application.

Our community has been enlarged by the many Ukraine refugees who have joined generous families locally. Councils stand ready with the needed scaffolding to embrace and enfold them into our communities as they recover from their ordeal.

The Easter season has been a time to reflect and come together with hopes of peace and stability to the region.

If you too want to do good, have fun and tackle problems, come into journalism or politics; if not give support to those who do, please.