Today one man and his wife start their walk to raise money for strangers many miles away.

It’s hot and it’s humid in England - the Istanbul side of warm - but that won’t stop them. As the rest of us flop in the shade they are off on their 142 mile walk. The route is from one side of the country to the other, and the aim is to raise money for those upturned by Zimbabwe’s waves of chaos.

Every penny will go to ZANE - Zimbabwe A National Emergency - the charity founded by Tom Benyon OBE to help Zimbabwe’s vulnerable, many of them elderly and destitute. It is for them, unsupported and stripped of dignity, that Tom keeps walking.

The money raised by each uncomfortable step will be stretched as far as it will go, to catch those from one end of life to the other - right from young children with clubfoot, to those whose savings, after years of service, simply evaporated.

Not even Tom can raise enough to help all of Zimbabwe’s vulnerable, but it doesn’t stop him trying … whatever his legs might say.

This year’s walk, begun as the UK starts to untether itself from Europe, is Tom’s eighth. His aim is to go from Hull to Liverpool, and the main cost, as in other years, will be in shoes, socks, hips and toenails. Most accommodation is in private homes, with a few B&Bs to fill any gaps, and midday meals will be a thousand blisters short of jolly, working lunches.

Every year the walks get tougher … not in length but in endurance. No-one can resist gravity for over seven decades without feeling its revenge. You only have to read Tom’s blog to get a sense of that.

I just hope that he and Jane reach Liverpool before they melt.

To find out more about ZANE and its work please visit the ZANE website. Once on the website, should you have the time and inclination to linger, you’ll find a bright red, sunburnt button that carries the hope and thanks of many.

A declaration of interest: I am now one of the ZANE trustees.

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Dear Reader

I have had the great pleasure of meeting many of ZANE’s beneficiaries over the years. As readers of my previous blogs will know, these meetings often don’t go as expected and the greetings can vary wildly: from enthusiastic shows of affection to being told by an aged lady to “Piss off”!

One recent encounter acts as a motivator for both Jane and me as we contemplate another walk, and the thought of weary legs and sagging morale in the days ahead. I met a lady for tea in Harare just a few months ago. She had worked hard as a school teacher all her career and she hadn’t been in a restaurant for over a decade. When I passed the milk to her, she said with tears in her eyes, “Oh milk in my tea. I’m so broke I don’t remember the last time I had milky tea.”

These are the people we walk for; for ex-service men and their widows surviving on one meal a day and with no medical cover of any kind; for children facing a life of disability through untreated clubfoot; for victims of political violence; and for old people who can be brought to tears by the mere offer of milk in their tea.

Yours sincerely

Tom Benyon
OBE
Chief Executive
Hull to Liverpool

Where appropriate, the names of walkers and hosts have been changed to protect confidentiality.

START Hull Maritime Museum, Date Finish Points
Tue 20 June Welton, Hull
Wed 21 June Yokefleet
Thu 22 June Drax
Fri 23 June Norton
Sat 24 June Hemsworth
Sun 25 June Dodworth
Mon 26 June DAY OFF
Tues 27 June Dunford Bridge
Wed 28 June Glossop
Thu 29 June Cheadle
Fri 30 June Lymm
Sat 1 July Bold Heath
Sun 2 July Liverpool FINISH

Completion of this walk brings Tom and Jane’s tally to a total of 2,235 miles – all walked on behalf of the frail, destitute and helpless of Zimbabwe.
The Day Before

We are driving up to Hull today – for tomorrow, Jane, I and our dog, Moses, embark on another mammoth trek. This time we’ll be walking to Liverpool – a mere 142 miles...

So why are we doing it?

We are walking for the poorest of the poor in Zimbabwe – a country and people often forgotten in the UK. Don’t forget ZANE has not had any material support from the UK government since our foundation in 2002.

We are walking to support the aged veterans who are obliged to live on one meal a day. Many of you may be suffering with heart conditions, high blood pressure, prostate problems, cataracts, hearing difficulties and all the rest of the ailments that afflict the elderly. Imagine suffering them without an NHS to look after us in our hour of need. We are walking to support them in their hour of need.

These addictions are having a disastrous effect on our young. It has been shown that the more youngsters look at Facebook, the more depressed they are likely to be. When can the young find the time to form proper non-Facebook friendships and talk properly? How can they find the time to read the likes of *Middlemarch* or write poetry or pray? Since they don’t spend time developing lasting relationships with real people, what happens when they feel lonely – do they find comfort in Facebook? When do they find time to talk to the old? Or, as delayed gratification is today a rarity, how do they make the necessary commitment to become expert in something?

Filling the Void

The young are bound by age restrictions when it comes to gambling, drugs or booze, though there are no such restrictions for Facebook, Twitter and video games – which are, of course, highly addictive too.
There are apps for every darn thing these days but none for tackling the roots of loneliness: forming deep loving relationships or finding real job satisfaction takes effort.

**Modern Plague**

Today, the number of youngsters on anti-depressants and committing suicide is spiralling upwards. As machines go faster and faster and devour our attention, and as families disconnect, people are growing ever more isolated and lonely. And some of the unlikeliest people grow miserable and isolated.

Loneliness is one of the miseries of our time and its blight stretches its tentacles throughout society. A picture taken years ago shows Baroness Thatcher hunched on a bench outside the House of Lords three hours before the doors opened. It was said that after she was defenestrated as PM, she never knew another day of happiness. When the caravan stopped, as stop it always does, she was desperately lonely.

Seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote about loneliness in his *Pensées*. Cheerful old soul that he was (but a very perceptive one), he claims that humankind seeks to be busy to avoid facing the reality that life always ends in sickness and death.

Pascal tells us that busyness as an end in itself seems to be the key to much human activity – from stamp collecting to buying houses to playing sport. Take “the chase” (hunting). Pascal claims that if the hunter were to be given the quarry before the chase, he would not thank you; if the gambler were to be given his winnings before the game is played, he would be angered. The business of travelling helps us forget the misery of the end game.

When American humourist Dorothy Parker was writing Hollywood film scripts, producer Cecil B DeMille asked why her films always ended unhappily?

“Because it’s true to life,” she replied. “Out of the 18 billion people born since Adam and Eve, not a single one has ever had a happy ending!”

Pascal reminds us that there is nothing so insufferable for man than to be completely at rest: he gets bored and welcomes strife. “All troubles arise,” he claims, “because of man’s inability to sit quietly with his own company in his own room.”

So Pascal would have understood modern addictions, and why people leave their mobiles on the dinner table: they are waiting for someone – anyone – to ring with an “important” message, all to assuage loneliness.

But much activity is empty vanity. Malcolm Muggeridge called one of his autobiographies *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, and Prime Minister Balfour said, “Nothing matters very much, and few things matter at all.” Anyone with a modicum of self-awareness must agree with these old saws, yet few dare to dwell on it because we want to kid ourselves that the trivia
we are working on really matters. In this often joyless universe, we need such assurances or we’d go potty. But when politicians talk of their “legacy”, I recall that long-serving deputy prime minister, Michael Heseltine, admitting that most of the things he has done will be forgotten; he’ll be remembered only for the trees he carefully plants on his estate.

To the Ends of the Earth
I’ll bet it was fear of loneliness that motivated explorers rather than

practising their navigational skills. After all, when Christopher Columbus sailed away on Santa Maria, he had no idea where he was going, when he reached America he had no idea where he was, and when he got back, he had no idea where he had been. But still he went!

And speed doesn’t help. I read somewhere that when the great explorer Sir Richard Burton (not the actor) sought the source of the Nile, he went at such a pace that soon his porters firmly refused to budge. When he angrily commanded them to move,
the headman answered: “We have walked fast for three days, Master; we are waiting for our souls to catch up.”

No Time to be Idle

Jane and I don’t have much time to be lonely. We are privileged to look after a never-ending series of grandchildren, and are in fact so busy we are tempted to add the following message to our answerphone:

“Thank you for ringing Tom and Jane. Press one for babysitting services, two for marriage advice, three for money. Your call will be answered shortly. Please do not hang up for your call is very important to us. Please note that this call may be recorded for training purposes.”

It’s interesting that for much of history, idleness was the hallmark of wealth and class. Beyond needlework and water colouring, classy people didn’t work much but spent time having tea with friends and going to concerts. When Lady Violet Bonham Carter asked her nanny in the early 1900s what life would be like when she grew up, she received this reply: “Until you are 18, you will do lessons. And after 18 you will do nothing.”

That was then, and it sounds very lonely. But I wonder what Pascal would make of our lives today?

I have supported ZANE for many years as they do excellent work amongst the vulnerable in Zimbabwe.

HRH Prince Michael of Kent gcvo

ZANE does an excellent job for the people of Zimbabwe. I wish the charity really well.

Rt Hon David Cameron
Former Prime Minister

ZANE is one of the most impressive charities I have seen. The charity provides practical support to the most vulnerable people and does so in a way that caters for their mental and physical needs. ZANE has a dedicated team which focuses on building relationships. ZANE staff ensure that every penny raised is used to deliver results.

HE Catriona Laing cb
UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe
Day 1: Hull Maritime Museum to Welton

The Forgotten Legion

Well it’s certainly a roasting day for walking from Hull to Liverpool – and it’s best not to think of the distance. I hum the well-known Harry Lauder tune as I walk: “Keep right on to the end of the road, keep right on to the end, though the way be long, let your heart be strong ...”

Lauder lost his only son in the First World War – the war that has almost entirely deserted living memory since everyone who fought in it has now died. The memories die to silence like a bell note. Poor Lauder never really recovered from his loss. Of course none of us would, I think it would be like losing a limb.

Another forgotten war with its forgotten warriors ... “They shall never be forgotten!” Oh really? When I last visited the Somme battlefields, the place was more or less deserted. Old Soldiers

We are walking for the benefit of the forgotten people of Zimbabwe, the poorest of the poor living in a sad country whose troubles the UK doesn’t want to know about. ZANE is in business to ensure that they are not forgotten – they must be allowed to live out the remainder of their lives with some dignity.

In September 2016, I read about the “Military Covenant” in the Times. It started way back in the days of Henry VIII (Google it) and, in effect, states that the UK owes a “duty of care” to all those who fought for the Crown. This is true no matter when or where they served, what rank they achieved, what unit they joined, or where they now live. I wondered why I had not known about this before, for it is serious stuff. The Covenant is more than a law, it is a sacred promise – and the UK’s charities and government today appear to be in serious breach.

It was Comedienne Joan Rivers who once wrote, “Old age is not for sissies.” How true. In February, I met a veteran in Bulawayo who was suffering advanced prostate cancer. I wondered why he was being neglected by the Covenant? All he was getting was a single meal a day with no healthcare cover or help with transport costs. That’s it. Why are we being so parsimonious?

I realised that these wonderful people are forgotten veterans who fought in more or less forgotten conflicts: not only in the Second World War, but also in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Aden. The British government needs to be reminded of their existence and our gross neglect – and as these veterans are very old, the government needs to act now before it is too late.

I have called these veterans members of the “Forgotten Legion”. Now pinched with age, 583 of them are today living in Zimbabwe, and a further 10,000 are living in 49 Commonwealth countries – stretching from Africa to India, Pakistan and Burma. Imagine, if you will, facing the miserable illnesses of old age – heart
problems, blood pressure issues, strokes, malaria, hearing loss, eye issues – without the NHS or a regular basic pension either.

I wrote to General Lord Richards, the chairman of our Services’ partner charity, The Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (RCEL). He used to head up the army and I asked him why the UK Services charities were not supporting these Commonwealth veterans more generously? David Richards agreed in principle that more should indeed be done.

As a result, a committee has been set up comprising the British Legion, all the UK Services charities and me. It’s being chaired by Sir Malcolm Rifkind and the vice chair is Lord Richards. Its task is to establish just how many veterans there are, and how much enhanced food aid and modest healthcare cover will cost.

Whilst not forgetting our prime task is to serve the poorest of the poor in Zimbabwe, ZANE is considering expanding its aid programme to try and raise money for this Forgotten
Legion. After all, they served the Crown in our time of need. Today they are frail and aged, and they must not be allowed to die in neglect and suffering in their darkest hour. We owe them a solemn duty of care.

**Priorities**

It’s not as if the military charities are short of money. A brief search indicates that the top dozen or so are raising the thick end of £460m (£50m from the Royal British Legion’s Poppy Appeal alone) each year. Of this, 99.6 per cent is being spent in the UK where veterans enjoy the benefits of the NHS, pension provision and social welfare.

Has anyone been to the Arboretum Memorial site near Burton on Trent in Staffordshire – a centre of remembrance for all the UK regiments? It’s an amazing place but it must have cost a fortune to build. And a surprising sum is spent by the UK charities on other memorials, museums, remembrance days, graves and so on. That’s fine if our obligations to the suffering, living veterans have been met. However, the expenditure of some of this money seems a trifle odd to me. For example, a million was spent on the restoration of the Wellington Monument in Somerset that commemorates the battle of Waterloo and its 200th anniversary. How can that be justified when in the same breath we have to admit that thousands of old soldiers are living miserable lives, suffering and forgotten across the Commonwealth?

In my view, unless some medical provision is made by the MOD and the Services charities, the UK as a whole will continue to be in breach.

If ZANE doesn’t pursue this issue, then who else will do so? And if not now, when?

**The View That Dares Not Speak Its Name**

I watched Tim Farron of the Lib Dems struggle with the Inquisition about whether he believed “gay sex” was sinful? Not the tendency to homosexuality – easy to answer – but homosexual sex acts, red in tooth and claw.

Tim has now resigned as leader on grounds that it is no longer possible for practising Christians to head up political parties in the UK. He is a brave and principled man who was caught by a crew of sanctimonious journalists that hounded him from office. There was no escape: if he answered “incorrectly” in the eyes of the liberal media – and the Lib Dems – it was obvious it would be Good Night Sweet Prince for his career and damaging for his party too.

The question of whether homosexual sex is sinful or not has snowed up the Church of England for many years now – who knows when or if it will ever emerge from the drifts. Poor old Farron wrestled with his questioners for months. Apparently he’s a committed Christian and a serious man, and we all know what the Good Book says – don’t we just. At first, he probably hoped that by keeping shtum, the questioners would go away. But then it must have dawned on him
that our country is in the grip of an all-powerful metropolitan liberal elite in sole charge of the snide newspaper columns and shrieking headlines that dominate our society.

Theresa May agreed the same thing on the Andrew Marr Show. I don’t know whether anyone bothered to ask Jeremy Corbyn, but perhaps we know that the only act he considers truly sinful is to vote Tory – meaning no one bothered to pop him the question.

_Damned If You Do…_

Now personally I am tired of the gay subject that has consumed so much of the time and energy of the CoE over past years, and has generated so much ill feeling. I wish we could move on, but round we go. And no! I am not going to give my personal view. Perhaps you’d be surprised by what I think – but either way, I’d offend at least half of ZANE’s donors so I might as well keep my own counsel.

However, I am exercised by the thought police who demand that everyone must have the same opinion – and if you don’t agree, you’re forever damned as bigot meat. This is neither liberal nor democratic, so poor old Tim. The liberal consensus questioners appear to be cowards. Why don’t they ask the same question of Muslim politicians?

A glance at a Muslim website indicates a hard line. According to “Just Ask Islam” for example, homosexuality is a crime against man’s sexuality (no space is given for women’s views). Homosexual acts are therefore to be punished by either 100 lashes for the unmarried or death by stoning for the married. Occasionally for hardliners, Sharia law states that death should be for both partners. What does the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, think?

For all I know, at least half of public opinion may be out of tune with the liberal consensus on gay sex. I think that today many practising Catholics would be unhappy that the debate appears to have been stolen by the liberal elite. They will be joined by many members of most of the Christian churches, and many in the Jewish and Muslim communities too. Perhaps there are many secular humanists that don’t support the liberal consensus either? However, no one dares speak out because who wants to be targeted as a bigot, and lose preferment at work or even their job?

Furthermore, I suspect that there is a “silent majority” who hold traditional views on marriage, abortion, euthanasia, keeping Sunday different and supporting women who are happily content to be homemakers. I understand that there has been a survey on British attitudes that identified “accelerated growth in liberal attitudes toward sex and sexuality” but that still means there are a lot of people who don’t subscribe to those views. All we read in the media are articles mocking and attacking traditional views (that are not necessarily racist or homophobic), but we never see articles attacking liberal views.
We should support politicians who bravely hold private views and face being given the ghastly Star Chamber treatment. Perhaps church leaders think it’s prudent not to challenge the liberal consensus. But of course we must remember that Jesus rarely spoke his mind in case he embarrassed the Pharisees ... or maybe I’ve got that wrong?

One ‘I’

Author Joseph Connolly was at a book signing at Hatchards, and after the first hundred customers or so, was looking forward to his lunch. Growing bored, he found himself signing away without looking up at the queue of fans waiting for a scribble.

“To whom am I inscribing it?” he asked one man who identified himself as Ian.

“Is that one ‘I’ or two?” Connolly asked.

There was a stony silence until eventually the author looked up.

“The guy only had one eye,” Connolly later said.

Day 2: Welton to Yokefleet

The Great Divide

Yesterday we walked through Hull past the magnificent Humber Bridge, which was wrapped in early morning mist. We walked the line of the old docks and read some history.

I had no idea of the key role played by Hull and Liverpool between 1836 and 1914 when they served as a gateway for 2.2 million European emigrants fleeing religious turmoil and grinding hardship for the New World. Arriving first in Hull and then Liverpool, they boarded the ship that took them terrified but hopeful to the States. These people were the original “huddled masses yearning to be free.”

We lunched in Ferriby and saw the outlines of two 4,000-year-old ships, the oldest vessels ever to sail our coasts. We got chatting to two helpful cops and told them about our walk to Liverpool. They wondered if we were bonkers. “It’s a long way you know,” said one as he hesitatingly checked if we were out on day release. I reassured him we know what we are doing though I don’t think he believed me.

I asked them if they had read senior policeman John Sutherland’s excellent book, *Blue: A Memoir – Keeping the Peace and Falling to Pieces*. Sutherland suggests that police do such a difficult job that we should thank them. So that’s what I did (the cops looked even more astonished).

Counting the Plusses

I am well aware that the subject of Brexit leads to argument and ill feeling, which is why I am still not going to say how I voted. I found the choice conflicting and my family divided. There were clearly arguments to be made on either side of the fence, and at the time I wished that Cameron hadn’t called a referendum at all. However, now that we are Brexit-bound, we had just better get on with it.
The next couple of years aren’t going to be easy: staying in had problems, and leaving will hurt. I reckon that the EU needs us as much as we need them. The younger democracies have benefited from our wisdom as a nation state and we have the best civil service in the world. That may sound a bit patronising but it’s undeniably true – and now these countries will have something of a wisdom deficit.

From now on there are bound to be large road bumps ahead for us all; stops and starts, good days and dreadful ones. Buckle your seatbelts and hope for the best!

However, the UK has certain things going for it and that makes me optimistic. First, we are an immensely resilient people; we have faced vast and intractable difficulties in the past and we have always surmounted them – and so will we now. Second, whatever Jean Claude Junker says – and with his gross style, he was hardly a valuable advocate for the Remain campaign – the world speaks English. It’s the language of commerce, the arts, diplomacy, international science and sport. English is spoken in the USA, Canada, Australia (after a fashion), New Zealand, in much of
Africa and in South America – and it won’t be replaced by Esperanto anytime soon.

Third, we are sited smack on the most favourable time zone for the rest of the world to do business with. Fourth, people enjoy working in the UK and some even like our weather! We are an immensely stable, old democracy and it takes a lot to shiver us to our foundations. Thank goodness, despite the efforts of Heseltine, Blair and Mandelson, we never found ourselves wedged in the Euro – which is headed towards disaster. The reason is that countries are only willing to bail out or subsidise parts of their own country – for example, West Germany made vast capital transfers to East Germany, yet German voters refused point blank to bail out another country in the Eurozone bloc however desperate the need (look at the plight of Greece). Yes, such transfers have to be made. It is only a matter of time before the Euro fails, and when that happens, we will be grateful to be like Macavity ...

Finally, the UK is a basically honest country. If you want to do business, the UK is a top choice, for our courts are incorrupt, and in the main, our financial exchanges are well policed and honest. Put it this way, I think I would rather transact business in the UK than in Africa, China, India, South America, Russia, anywhere with “stan” in its name, and many parts of the EU that recently emerged from communism in the 1990s.

Let’s face it, we have plenty of advantages. I am sure we’ll survive somehow – and perhaps even prosper.

**Total Nonsense**

How has such a fully-fledged ass as Alan Wilson become a bishop in the Church of England? I heard him in the box recently, talking about the row in the early 1980s caused by John Smyth QC – who was accused of causing grievous bodily harm to a number of Christian youths by flogging them unmercifully. At the same time, Smyth was apparently involved in an evangelical group responsible for teaching the gospel to mainly young men.

I have never met Smyth or attended the camps, but at least 3,000 young men attended and many progressed to serve the Anglican Church. Among their number was the great John Stott, Canon John Collins, Canon David MacInnes, Canon David Cook and many other holy men. There is no doubt that the teaching was gospel-based and fundamental to the success of their subsequent ministries.

Bishop Wilson claims that the non-liberal teaching taught in the camp in some way spurred Smyth to behave as he did. What total nonsense. Smyth is obviously a one-off weirdo. Let’s hope he will be extradited from South Africa, where he now lives, tried and jailed. But does Bishop Wilson honestly believe that over the years there have been no sexual crimes committed by liberal vicars? And if he does, when will he be certified?
Day 3: Yokefleet to Drax

Group Therapy

A long old trek today. I was excitedly told that Drax houses the biggest power station in England – although what you are meant to do with that sort of information beats me? It’s a dreary place mouldering in indifferent countryside. The views are set against dirty-sheet skies and accompanied by an intermittent drizzle; the mix matches my mood to a tee. Whose daft idea was this sodding route anyway? Jane bustles along, and as usual issues me with a string of breezy exhortations: “Come on, Tom, please cheer up for Heaven’s sake and stop being so totally dreary!” Some hope.

We had delightful hosts last night in Pocklington. They kindly made a picnic for us and as it is belting with rain, we eat it in the car. Nothing like misted windows, farmyard smells and slanting rain to raise the appetite. Using my finger on the windscreen, I list all the mistakes I have made in my life and I quickly ran out of glass. There is nothing like wallowing in a bit of gloom.

I spend the day in deep thought about the ghastly spot dear Theresa May has managed to paint herself into. Poor woman. What a dreadful job she now has. She is surrounded by critics while her so-called “friends” look like people who want to ruin her – and they probably will.
Westminster Weeping

I have commented before on the intrusive way the media tries to probe our emotions to enable its readers and viewers to indulge in some recreational grief. It’s a sort of emotional pornography.

“Mrs Peabody,” they ask with a camera up close: “What exactly was your reaction when you heard that your daughter had been killed by a mad axeman?” This is a line of questioning that makes me want to reach for the sick bag. I always want someone to answer, “Mind your own sodding business!” – but they never do.

The escalation of our national emotional incontinence became apparent late last year when there was a debate in the Commons about women losing a child in infancy. Some MPs were apparently weeping and others joined in with their sad stories, as if the debate was some sort of group therapy. Is that what the House of Commons is for? Can you imagine the Iron Lady or Barbara Castle doing such a thing?

Infant death was a commonplace in previous centuries through poor medical treatment; and then, of course, young sons were slaughtered on an industrial scale in war, and the pulling down of blinds was ubiquitous. These generations had to face their heartbreaks with a considerable degree of stoicism because sadness was everywhere. The prevailing mood was just to get on with it, keep your upper lip stiff, and grin and bear it.

You can still see this today, but it is becoming uncommon. When my friend, the Daily Telegraph columnist Cassandra Jardine, sadly died, her actor husband performed that very night. He didn’t weep on stage and ask for pity: he just did his job. And when home secretary Amber Rudd’s father recently died, just three days later she appeared on the election leaders’ debate on television. Good for her, I’m sure that’s just what her father would have wanted.

Keep Calm and Carry On

I make a bold distinction between being able to talk properly about feelings to friends and family (and I am all for sensitive counselling) and parading feelings in the media – which usually becomes an exercise in self-indulgence. There was a time when emotional restraint was considered to be a high form of courage. I think that this general need for public acknowledgement of distress weakens respect.

Reader, we have all had ghastly problems to live with, haven’t we? However, as Bear Grylls recently said, “When life kicks the shit out of us all, we have to get on with it, and Buddha’s ‘Life is Suffering’ is a hole in one.” So when the shit hits our particular fan, we can either give way to despair and self-pity, or we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down and start all over again.

Would we rate our police chief, Commissioner Cressida Dick, more highly and sleep better in bed at
night if we knew the detail of her heartbreaks? (I should add I know nothing of the good lady, all I am saying is we all have our miseries and failures, even she).

Would we feel more secure and regard our generals and admirals – those who are charged with the onerous task of our national security and the protection of our country – more highly if they were seen weeping over the ghastly scenes of carnage and horror in Afghanistan or Syria? Or would we feel less safe?

I would much prefer Theresa May to be tough, gimlet-eyed and unemotional as she negotiates the Brexit road ahead than weeping with stress in Number 10 and asking us to feel her pain – as she now appears to be trying to do. And emotional continence should not be mixed up with a ruthless determination to show the people she is on their side. It’s plain sad May seems unable to do this naturally. Churchill mixed with the crowds during the Blitz, as did the royal family. Shyness and caution may cost May her job.

**Virtue Signalling**

Emotional outpouring was given astonishing momentum at the time of the faux grief expressed when Princess Diana died. I never understood who the weeping donors thought would benefit from their tons of flowers (other than florists and manufacturers of cellophane), for Diana – like Old Marley from *A Christmas Carol* – was as dead as a doornail.

For a while, the poor queen was under considerable pressure for not demonstrating that she “cared” enough to satisfy the public’s taste for weeping and the rending of garments. She was obliged to leave Balmoral for London, and make a broadcast to confirm that she did indeed “care”. It’s beyond conceit, of course, for the public to assume to know how someone feels, but’s that’s exactly what happened. Once upon a time, you were considered to be a good person if you acted honourably according to generally accepted codes of conduct. But today all this has collapsed in favour of individual expression and “feelings”; the public demonstration of suffering becomes necessary as a badge of honour, as it makes a person morally untouchable.

The audience signals its virtue by displaying compassion towards suffering people – “I feel your pain” – to show how warm and kind it is. Anyone who says this is sentimental and self-indulgent hogwash is accused of being unkind and unfeeling.

**Slippery Slope**

The young royals appear to want to try and rebrand the monarchy and let emotion spill out. They seem much more like their mother and father in this respect than their grandparents. It was Charles who, like a big girl’s blouse, began to moan to the press about the way the media was making his life difficult “under the burdens of great privilege.” And can you ever forget Diana endlessly blethering on
about depression, bulimia and her emotional longings?

Today William, Kate and Harry appear to have forgotten the words of Walter Bagehot who warned, “not to let daylight in upon magic.” That means preserving the mystery of the monarchy. I read that Prince Harry was pictured kissing his girlfriend Meghan Markle at a polo match: “The first public snog!” screamed the headlines. Then Kate was pictured topless in some foreign magazine, and both Harry and William decided to talk publicly about the pain of their mother’s death. On top of that, they set up “Heads Together” where they all sat on a beach and pretended to talk as normal human beings. They claimed it’s not about them, they were speaking to help others: but there is a lot of virtue signalling going on there, and it was all about them really wasn’t it?

Is all this wise? I think not. Apparently the Palace didn’t approve and the young royals were told to stop emoting in public. Can you see the Duke of Edinburgh parading his heart on his
sleeve, or the queen? And have they been successful custodians of the monarchy or not these past 60 years? The queen knows she is hugely popular partly because she doesn’t go on about what is in her head. Nor does the duke. Can you imagine his retort if he were asked how he felt when Mountbatten was assassinated or when his children got divorced?

The queen and the duke are wise old birds and they know instinctively that the public don’t want the royals to be too familiar. Their reticence should be copied. If the young royals go on sharing their pain with us and seeking sympathy, then one fine day, the capricious public will suddenly grow tired ... Talk of slinging them out will slowly begin in the very newspapers that have been exploiting them by parading their pain, and pictures of wannabe President John Prescott or Diane Abbot will suddenly swim grinning into focus before our appalled eyes.

Day 4: Drax to Norton
Fields of Joy

Another miserable day on the march, trying to wade through rights of way now turned into jungles by neglectful landowners and councils.

Okay, why bother to make these paths passable? Judging from the vast size of the locals, I can only assume that they never walk. They must spend their time lolling in front of their tellies eating pan-fried Mars bars. Sorry about that but it’s true. The NHS will sink soon in a welter of worn out hip joints, cases of diabetes and heart attacks. Everyone saw this health tsunami coming but we’ve done more or less nothing about it.

Like the “where the sod are we bird”, Jane and I go round and round in ever decreasing circles. I expect to find myself jammed up my own backside at any moment. Seriously, after hunting for the right track, we find ourselves in the garden of a rich farmer’s hideous red house facing two enormous “sod off” gates – with no visible means of leaving the darned place. We have to retrace our steps, adding another mile to our tally.

Foreign Country

I read the news about George Carey – poor man! Such a good person too. I know him from way back and I like him. It must be so galling to find yourself caught out like that after so many years. George made his judgments – before the ghastly Savile row – in 1990. Author LP Hartley wrote, “The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there”. Quite so. George is being judged in hindsight by 2017 rules – we have all learned a few things along the way. I will write to him when I get back. I discovered a while ago that when a friend is in trouble always ring, write or visit. Don’t hesitate, just do it.

In Pursuit of Happiness

I wish I had a happy face, but even when I am feeling on top of the world, in quiet repose my face just looks
grumpy. People ask me, “What on earth’s wrong?” But when I say, “I’m feeling just fine thank you,” they back away looking bemused. I know lots of mouldy people whose faces look happy. It’s most unfair.

What makes us happy? It has to be more than a warm puppy. It’s not that man doesn’t try to be happy. We put prodigious effort into the search, but like the end of the rainbow, the goal appears elusive.

French philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote about man’s great experiment: simply to prove that chasing after money, sex and power would lead to happiness. For countless years, people have tried to make the experiment work – but it always results in failure.

In any other scientific field, this ridiculous experiment would have been junked years ago. But generation after generation tries to make it work all over again.

Of course, money doesn’t bring happiness – in fact quite the reverse is true. It took me years to learn that lesson, but it is now firmly embedded in my skull.

Do people really change? Rarely. Once a philanderer always a philanderer, and the same is true of a liar. Was Monica Lewinsky a one-off conquest for Bill Clinton? Well how credulous can you get? He was a serial fornicator.

**Vital Ingredients**

Freud thought that work and love are essential to happiness. Noel Coward wrote that working was more fun than fun, and I like that. I wrote in an earlier blog that every man needs a maiden to woo, a battle to fight and a cause bigger than himself to live for, and that’s a useful starting point.

Good health is important to the state of happiness, but I have met people who, although permanently bedridden, appeared to live thoroughly fulfilling lives despite their problems. Being reasonably attractive helps as people are inclined to be warm towards you. But extreme beauty can be a drawback. The poet Yeats wrote in his poem “Prayer for my Daughter” that he hoped God would give her beauty but not “... such beauty that makes a stranger’s eyes distraught.” The wrong sort of beauty destroyed Marylyn Monroe and countless others besides.
I once employed a woman with an incredibly beautiful face and body. Men immediately thought that she was “up for it” and so would leer at her at every opportunity. However, in character she was as pure as any woman I have ever met, and she hated the looks and inevitable groping she attracted.

Apparently statistics indicate that first-born children have a tendency to happiness, as do children with both parents living at home, and men who are married. People can be happy fighting in war because there is the band-of-brothers element, a strong sense of common purpose and the feeling that they are involved in something useful and bigger than themselves. Often those engaged in war are testing themselves. That seems to be important too. And note that happy people are rarely gloomily sitting on a “Lazee-boy” sofa watching daytime TV. They are usually involved in some ongoing interchange with life, however inconsequential that may look at first sight.

Happy people often have work that is a love affair, a passion. Teachers can be like that, and so are vicars. And, of course, actors – you have to be in love with the stage to put up with the insecurity and the rotten money. You can’t accuse anyone engaged in these difficult professions that they are doing it to get rich. But if you actually enjoy your work then you are profoundly lucky, for a passion can see us through the dark periods in life.

**Finding Your Inner Leaf**

I read somewhere that we all have to be a “leaf on a tree.” We should be individuals with a sense that we really matter, yet at the same time part of something bigger than ourselves – a family, a community, a regiment, a hospital, a theatre group, a political party ... A leaf that has fallen off a tree has the advantage that it can float around a bit; but then it becomes disconnected, decays and dies. Far better to be an evergreen leaf that hangs on!

It seems that the people who are best protected from anger and heart disease are those who are socially involved. They are attractive because they are not introverted – they are the ones asking the questions and they want to know about other people’s lives. If you are complicated or socially needy, people will choose to avoid you. It’s best to avoid introspection – so ask others about themselves and stop talking about yourself all the time!

Next, embrace change. I’m not suggesting you should move house every second year but have enough change in your life to keep things interesting. Boat rocking can be good for our health while uniformity is a great threat to happiness – so don’t “take care”, instead “take a risk”.

Live for the moment. Focus on the things that you want to do, and then get on and do them (if you reckon they’re worthwhile). If gardening is a pleasure, then garden away. Spend less time working on the family finances, talk to friends and family, and listen to
the opera (if that is the thing that floats your boat).

Then audit your happiness. Why do things that make you unhappy? And if you are happy, then tell your face and keep on smiling at others – for it transmits a signal: “Happy person here!” If you feel negative, just tell yourself that you have to be positive. Act, play the part, listen to Julie Andrews: “Whistle a little tune” and then put on a happy face. If you are feeling miserable, tell yourself to feel happy instead: that in itself can trigger a change in how we feel. A wise old preacher, Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, once said that one of the greatest tragedies is to say of someone: “He was born a man yet he died a doctor.” This means don’t let your career eat you alive so you lose your humanity: you are a human being, not a human doing. I know headmasters, senior civil servants and generals who seem to be stuck like chicken in aspic, stuck where they used to be. It’s essential to be able to reinvent yourself – but it appears to be one of the hardest things to do.

Wheatfields

After George Osborne was introduced on the Andrew Marr Show as the MP for Schadenfreude North, he told viewers that Theresa May had boasted that the worst thing she had ever done was to “run through a wheatfield.”

As George glanced down to look at the election results, he commented, “Well, she won’t be able to say that anymore, will she?”

Day 5: Norton to Hemsworth

House Rules

A far better day today, if only because the sun shines and the paths don’t tie themselves into reef knots with hidden holes every few hundred yards. We walk at a pace.

It’s sad that so many of the churches seem to be closed. Even the majestic St Laurence Priory in Snaith is shut to the world – although it is strewn with bunting, a sign that it is still used for occasional weddings (the default position for a secular society that does not take faith seriously but still wants a pretty “church” wedding).

We are losing our faith with the speed of a hot air balloon letting out air whilst the Muslim community builds mosques financed by Saudi Arabia at an astonishing speed. In 2015, 259 were built in Germany and 180 in the UK, so this take-over of our culture is a European phenomenon. Do we all understand what is happening here under our uncomprehending noses?

The trouble is that anyone who raises concerns is called “racist” and how do you prove a negative? It would seem that we have lost confidence in ourselves and in our ancient European values. We are being taken over by aliens. And none of us has been asked if that’s what we want. The trouble is that many of the political parties that are pointing out the enormity of what is happening to our country appear to be infested by rather unpleasant people that very few worried moderates would wish to be involved with.
The culture of the UK is altering. Our politicians seem to think that the UK’s traditional liberal outlook on, for example, women’s equality, gay rights, freedom of speech, regard for human rights and Christian values (from which much of the above stems) will be absorbed and accepted by the immigrant community. Dream on.

**A Letter from Your PM**

When I am king or emperor – roll on the day – I will make the rules about who can enter the UK and who cannot, and who can stay and who has to leave, crystal clear. I am tired of political correctness, and I refuse to worry about whether or not I offend some individual and their culture.

Here is the letter that I, as prime minister, would send all immigrants when they arrive in the UK.

Dear Would-be Citizen,

Please note that we are really very pleased to see you. Here are some points for you to think about.

First, entry as a citizen into the United Kingdom is a privilege and not a right. The UK is our home, it is not a hotel.

Our nation’s culture has been developed over many centuries, and it has emerged – bloodstained – from many ghastly struggles, trials and tribulations along the way. Brave men and women have selflessly fought for our freedoms over the centuries, and much blood and treasure have been spent in learning painful lessons. For example, we have learned the hard way how to be a peaceful society, and how to be good British citizens, friends and neighbours. So please respect our
ways. And take note: Sharia Law is not recognised in any part of the UK and it never will be.

We speak English ... Our national tongue is not Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, French or any other language. Therefore if you want to become a fruitful member of our society, please take the trouble to learn the language – and at your own expense – or kindly leave.

Most of the people in the UK, however vaguely, believe in a Christian God; our nation’s structures and institutions are founded on Christian principles and this is clearly documented. It is certainly appropriate to parade the essence of our Christian inheritance on the walls of our schools and universities. If this offends you, I suggest you consider making another part of the world your home, because our Christian inheritance is part of our DNA.

We are a very tolerant society: we will accept your beliefs – provided of course they do not involve breaking our laws. All we ask is that you accept ours, and live with us in harmony and peace.

We are proud of our history and indeed our colonial past. We accept that, like all human constructs, our empire wasn’t perfect – it was a mixture of good and not so good. But if you want to vociferously protest and march against our history and culture, or criticise our heroes, please do so somewhere else.

We expect you to be law abiding. Kindly note that if you prove to be a serial law breaker, you will run the real risk of being sent back from whence you came.

This is our country, our land and our lifestyle. We will allow you every opportunity to enjoy all this as we warmly welcome you. But if you are one of those who wants to complain and moan about our way of life, our culture, our religion or our proud history, I encourage you to take advantage of one of our great liberties, namely “The Right to Leave”.

You are most welcome in this country – but you really will need to accept us warts and all!

Yours sincerely,

Prime Minister

Day 6: Hemsworth to Dodworth

Love and Kisses

Walking through West Yorkshire, I wonder why the litter is even worse than anywhere else we’ve been to recently. Why are the footpaths unkempt? Then I see a sign reading, “West Yorkshire: working for peace” (I promise this is true, I kid you not), and I have my answer.

Has the CEO gone totally bonkers? As I walk, I imagine the letter this pompous ass must have sent to his colleagues:

Dear Comrade,

My assistants and I have decided that instead of doing boring and mundane
things, such as looking after the roads and schools or collecting rubbish, we are to serve society in the noble cause of peacekeeping (unlike the councils in East Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Central Yorkshire – and what do you expect from the likes of them?!

Frankly, we consider that the UN and NATO are inadequate on their own, and the world needs the West Yorkshire County Council to bring about peace in our time.

To that end, we propose to send a stern letter to Vladimir Putin and that plump little git with the funny haircut in North Korea saying that if they decide to bomb the UK, please remember that West Yorkshire is neutral and working for peace.

If West Yorkshire is attacked, I have instructed Councillor Vera Bootle – who stands five feet high and weighs 18 stone – to walk to the county border, remove her clothes and moon at the oncoming tanks. We are convinced that such a sight will stop them in their tracks.

At the same time, we will erect a vast sign in the football stadium to be read by passing bombers saying “We surrender”. It will be made from beer cans, discarded pizza boxes, old cigarette packets and condoms, all culled from nearby roads. We have decided not to collect this in past months just in case it was needed for this purpose.

I am also going to visit the 799 twins with our county (club class) to make speeches about peace. We will be bringing “peace boxes” of Yorkshire butties as gifts. Invited councillors will be those who agree with me (about everything), as well as my pretty new administrative assistant.

What a pretentious ass the CEO has to be. Please get back to the day job.

*Mwah Mwah*

Have you noticed how often cheeks are turned for the mandatory kiss – often by people you hardly know? Let’s be frank, at least half of the time I’m sure many of us would choose to remain chaste (if that were an option).

But when the cheekbone is presented, what can you do – for it’s expected now, isn’t it? So instead of extending a hand, we cave in and go “mwah mwah” along with everyone else. But it doesn’t stop there, does it? When did you last end a letter with “love from ...” – and to someone you have no particular affection for or have hardly ever met? If we end our letters with the quite solemn and serious word “love” to people we don’t love, how are we supposed to end letters to people we really do love? Perhaps to our loved ones, we should now seal our letters – as they apparently did in the last war – with “SWALK”: “Sealed With A Loving Kiss” adorned on the envelope. There were other acronyms that even in these rude times seem unprintable (even worse that BURML – Be Undressed and Ready My Love!). But at least the soldiers then had the excuse that they were terminally frustrated.

My point is, perhaps we should reserve the word “love” for people we really do care about deeply.
Real Heroes

There is another serious dumbing down of a word: “hero”. The media continually blurs the distinction between a victim who may have suffered a ghastly mishap or accident, and a real hero. To anyone who thinks about it seriously, a hero is someone who has gone out of his or her way selflessly to try and save someone else’s life – or indeed a community – for a higher purpose.

The media on the other hand will add the soubriquet “hero”, for example, to someone who safely lands a stricken plane with passengers (whilst all they were really doing was saving their own life alongside others). Or, they will make a hero out of a soldier who has had their leg blown off in a war zone. The truth of the matter is that soldiers sign up voluntarily to take that risk, and becoming a casualty doesn’t make someone a hero (sorry about that). And, yes, the charity title, “Help for Heroes” has always made me cringe. It stems from our peacetime snivelling need, whilst drinking in the pub, to indulge in some recreational grief.

Anyone who served in a perfunctory action as, say, the Afghanistan or Iraq wars, and who was subsequently
caught up in a car crash or a court action (for example), will be described in media reports as a “war hero”. Such a precious word should be kept for the real thing – and heroes are as common as hen’s teeth.

The Dam Buster Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC DSO (and bar) was an undoubted hero, as was the great Audie Murphy, the highest decorated US soldier in the Second World War. Then my favourite hero, Sergeant Major Stan Hollis VC, charges in. On D-Day, 6 June 1944, Stan three times attacked German positions that were holding up the battalion advance. He charged them alone with a Sten gun and grenades, and he killed or took the defenders prisoners. After the war, his commanding officer said, “Hollis is the only man I met between 1939–45 who felt that winning the war was his personal responsibility.”

It’s only a tiny minority who have the sense of responsibility or a deep-rooted personal anger that stirs them to heroic actions. They are usually serving among the bulk of their colleagues who resent being shown up by what they perceive as dangerous “gong” hunters. The majority of soldiers would much rather be at home, and have no wish to be “brave” or run the risk of being killed or maimed.

Lord Macaulay’s “Horatius” demanded:

“And how can man die better than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods?”

But that’s a minority belief. Those stirred by that sentiment are the real McCoy.

Though, to be fair, I never did say I was a hero …! Reader, what about you?

By the Way …

I was told that the rings of Saturn are not astral dust at all, but are actually made up of airline lost luggage forever circling the planet.

Day 7: Rest Day

Millennial Snowflakery

I see that Archbishop Sentamu has waded into the political arena with a suggestion that we should all voluntarily pay more tax. I am of the view that governments are appalling spenders of taxpayers’ money. I suggest that Sentamu should stick to his day job of preaching the Gospel and stop talking virtue-signalling nonsense.

Footing the Bill

Government waste? The Type 45 destroyer, the most modern ship in the navy, has an engine made by Rolls Royce that “doesn’t work” in areas with a high ambient air and sea temperature. Just as well we’ll never want to send ships to the Persian Gulf or the coast of Somalia then. Apparently the inability of our destroyers to match the sea worthiness of the cruise liner Queen Mary is the result of the Ministry of Defence
failing to test these ships long enough to demonstrate that the ships were unreliable.

The cost of this disaster is estimated to be about £280m. And because of the way the contracts have been drawn up, Sir Humphrey, the shipbuilder, gets off scot-free. The bill is to be picked up by taxpayers: that is, dear reader, you and me!

Then there is the NHS’s abandoned national IT programme which costs north of £10bn while private companies build schools that were obliged to close because they couldn’t take high winds. Or what about the airstrip of St Helena that cost £250m? Unfortunately, aeroplanes cannot land on it because of cross winds. Or the £250m squandered on the “Troubled Families” programme that has made no appreciable impact whatsoever in tackling deprivation?

Why can’t we see the names of the civil servants who are responsible for these ghastly financial fiascos? Politicians get sacked from time to time but civil servants seem to survive from catastrophe to catastrophe.

**Slings and Arrows**

My generation was taught the merits of a stiff upper lip. For example, when eight-year old Quintin Hailsham (one-time Lord Chancellor) arrived at his new prep school, the bigger boys cut up his teddy bear before his weeping face, and flushed it down the lavatory with whoops of glee.
Okay, my education was not quite as nasty as that – for one thing, I didn’t have a teddy to cut up – but compared to today’s pampering, it was merciless enough. And I’ll bet, dear Reader, that yours was pretty razor-edged too. I recall vividly that from an early age, pustular eruptions and any physical peculiarities were highlighted by schoolmates who then teased out our character weaknesses and paraded them at every opportunity. One windy friend was called “Farty” for four long years ...

My time in the army was equally challenging: the Sandhurst staff roared their opinions at top tempo about our physical and mental inadequacies to anyone prepared to listen. “You ghastly inadequate bastard!” was the least of the abuse. Just imagine our young tolerating that kind of treatment today.

There were rules that governed our behaviour – and anyone who breached the unwritten codes was cast out. The lesson was that emotional continence was not an option, it was essential. It was no use complaining or moaning, and to let others see you were unduly sensitive spelt disaster – for if weaknesses could be identified, the sharks would swiftly move in for the kill.

On reflection, I reckon it did no lasting harm: we were toughened to cope with life’s slings and arrows. But today’s young are obsessed with sensitivity and self. What on earth has happened to us all? Is it raging feminism and political correctness that has reduced the young to a laundry box of big girl’s blouses?

How’s this for offended sensibilities? A student was admitted to hospital for a week having read a novel that was part of her course. She claimed to have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) apparently triggered by the book. While I accept, of course, that PTSD can occur amongst soldiers who have been on active duty, I reject the idea that our peacetime life is so traumatic that ordinary citizens need to be treated like shell-shocked veterans of war. That sums it up really: 20 million deaths in the First World War, 62 million deaths in the Second World War. There was no counselling then but here is a weeping student overwhelmed by a daft novel.

And it’s not just our introspection either. Political correctness prevents our telling one another hard truths because we are terrified of giving offence. So doctors daren’t tell patients that unless they – or their children – shed some blubber, they will wear out their hips, hearts and attract diabetes. Who is brave enough to tell a friend he smells, or that if he drinks any more, he will die an early death? Do we dare tell a friend that if he leaves his wife and infant children to shack up with a Thai girl he found on the Internet, it is bound to end in mayhem with lives destroyed? Or that he will be sucked dry of money?

The educated middle classes have abandoned the moral authority they once had. What morality is and who holds it is today hotly contested, so we shrug and walk away. Our liberal ideology has persuaded us to abandon the imposition of moral teaching,
even formal education on children. Apparently it is considered to be “sexist” to teach girls how to cook, so parents let their children choose what they want to eat with disastrous results.

In a local school play, everyone had a part (it was more a crowd control exercise than a “performance”). Out of the hundred or so children, there were three – around eight years old – who were larded in fat. When the play ended, they waddled out with their parents like tugs towing a steamer. I suppose neither the headmistress nor the school doctor would dare risk the vicious row if they warned of future health hazards. But I reckon that letting your children grow obese is a form of child abuse.

**Life and Death**

The idea that no one should criticise anyone else can have grave results. Take the ghastly case of baby “P”, beaten to death by his parents. Shortly before his death, Peter was seen by a social worker. However, his face was a mess of chocolate. The social worker was so affected by political correctness that she failed to insist the child be cleaned in case she caused “offence”.

![Humorous illustration of a mother and child with the caption “Mum, can you run me next door?”](image)
Had the child been cleaned, of course the deep bruises would have been visible – and perhaps a life might have been saved. How terrible is that story?

And consider that in the last few years, the industrial rape of young girls in Northern towns by Asian men continued unabated because the social workers and the police chose to turn a blind eye towards the abuse rather than run the risk of being thought to be “raaaacist”. Some even thought that children should be allowed to choose prostitution as a “lifestyle” choice.

Go figure. How craven and marshmallow-soft have we become?

Perhaps the strangest story of all is that of a friend’s sister: she inherited a magnificent walnut chest on a stand, and my friend lusted after it. After he established that his sister didn’t want it, he offered to buy it. But she insisted that it went to public auction so Fred was forced to buy it under the hammer in Sotheby’s. He paraded it proudly in his dining room and asked his sister to dinner – setting the table especially so she was compelled to stare at the chest all evening. And neither of them commented: beat that for English reserve!

**Witch Hunters**

The act of rewriting the truth was a central theme in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Ministry of Truth was a state engine for propaganda based on his experiences with the BBC.

Apparently today, some teachers in South African universities are preparing their own agendas for students, rewriting details of the wicked British colonial past in such a way that it does not offend African sensibilities. The colonials were all rapacious, cruel and racist and the Africans were exploited, robbed and often slaughtered. The fact that Messrs Rhodes and Beit – in fact the Bill Gates and Warren Buffets of their time – chose to give away the totality of their fortunes for the good of humanity is forgotten, while the question, “Which African leader has ever given away tuppence to any entity other than his own Swiss bank account?” is never asked.

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**Day 8: Dodworth to Dunford Bridge**

**Ministry of Truth**

Today we walked through Barnsley and Grimethorpe. I recall when I last lambasted somewhere for being dreary and run down, someone gently reminded me that all sorts of kindly acts of quiet heroism go on behind the closed doors of ugly properties. This is true and I am silenced.

**Tupperware Wars**

I recall a row between a one-time friend and his younger sister. He accused her of stealing his mother’s Tupperware after her death and pledged never to talk to her again. Meanwhile, Clement and Lucian Freud didn’t speak for 40 years following a race across London’s Hampstead Heath.
However, it’s considered dangerous to contradict the apostles of the new truths even though their nonsense may pollute our children. The truth rewriters are using violent protest to force their case and generate publicity, and the number of protests is rising fast. Earlier this year, for example, leading sociologist Charles Murray was shouted down by student activists when giving a talk at Middlebury College in Vermont, USA. His book *The Bell Curve* just mentions ethnic variations in average IQ. He doesn’t actually say this is due to genetic differences but he discusses the arguments for and against this hypothesis. For this heresy, the students – who seem not to be at college to learn but to destroy any opposition to their arguments – labelled Murray a “white supremacist”. The students then went on to assault both him and his host, Professor Angela Stranger, who was bravely trying to protect him.

Other universities have been comparing notes and it seems there is a ritualized progress to these protests: they involve chanting and they resemble witch hunts. One said that this has all the hallmarks of a new fundamentalist religion. This faith believes that important racial differences are not derived from genes but from the environment. If you claim that race is a valid biological concept or that there are gender differences, both are deemed to be “social constructs” – the idea that they have any validity is said to be “fiction”, designed to protect “white male privilege.”

The sad truth is that anyone who dissents from this orthodoxy – and apparently dissenters include nearly all who are seriously studying human variances – is deemed to be a heretic. To indicate the role genes play in human behaviour is committing blasphemy. The fact that there is a mountain of evidence to support the belief that genes do, of course,
play a part in racial differences just
strengthens the resolve of the witch
hunters to double their protests.

One of the characteristics of religious
fundamentalists is that the more crazy
their views may appear to the outside
world, the more their adherents cling
to them as they damn all apostates.

Curriculum Vitae

When I visit care and nursing homes, I
sometimes have to remind myself that
the ancient husks listlessly watching
bingo on TV – now grey, wrinkled and
demented – were once virile and lusty
lovers. They weren’t always hobbling,
peering out in fear or dependent on us.
Perhaps it would be valuable for each
to have a picture of what they looked
like, say, on their wedding day hanging
on a hook at the end of their bed. And
a mini CV. Perhaps that would help us
keep in touch with our humanity.

Day 9: Dunford Bridge to Glossop

Mr Bean

Off at 7:30am and a long day today – but we are over half way, hooray! I
have to nip to London for a vital ZANE meeting that will affect the lives of a
great many people in our care – so a swift break for me (though no such
luck for Jane ...)

I catch the train at Glossop, a nice
little place though a pity about the
station. The ticket machine is broken,
the ticket sales people are on strike,
and the lavatories are all firmly locked
(I am told by a man who looks rather
desperate that no one knows where the
key is). To cap it all, it is pouring with
rain and a bitter wind strips the flesh
from my bones with great efficiency
and then returns for the marrow. True
that the weather isn’t the fault of the
railway network, but it neatly adds to
my gloom and makes me wonder why
we choose to live out our dreary little
lives at the bottom of a UK well?

Warty Talkers

Jane tells me that nine times out of
ten, when she sits next to a man –
any man – at a function or a casual
dinner, she is hardly ever asked
anything about herself, her work, her
family or her views. Instead the man
simply talks about himself, sharing his
often puerile opinions in exhausting,
drivelling detail. It’s an interesting
phenomenon that. Is it all women
most men simply ignore or just Jane?
And are most men simply incapable of
holding a proper conversation – the
purpose of which is surely to share
information and politely listen to the
stories of others? Were they never
taught basic manners when they were
children?

After all, Jane is a fascinating woman
who has worked as a social worker
specialising in mentally ill geriatrics
(do be aware that when she appears
to be nice and friendly, she is actually
professionally assessing you!) She
founded a charity for the mentally ill
and set up one of the first foodbanks in
the UK. And she has been an MP’s wife
and mothered four interesting children
– yet all this is ignored. It’s not just rude, but sad!

The American poet Don Marquis wrote about a toad called Warty Bliggens who sat under a tree celebrating the fact that the sun, moon and stars had been created for him alone. I recall that Marquis finished the poem by telling us not to laugh too much at Warty – for many human beings have similarly absurd notions!

**Bolt-on B*****d**

On our free day, we visited Bolton Abbey, a peaceful retreat shattered for the monks by Thomas Cromwell. He was, of course, acting under the orders of Henry VIII: what a total bastard he was – you only have too look at his piggy little eyes staring straight at you out of the vast Holbein picture in the Portrait Gallery to understand the sheer terror he must have instilled in everyone who served him. He was Stalin in ermine. Poor Thomas Cromwell, Henry’s dutiful servant, who did everything for Henry and yet was executed anyway because he fell out with the nobles.

In the afternoon, we went to Towton Moor, the UK’s largest and bloodiest battleground. This is where the Yorkists finally beat the Lancastrians in 1467 and thus ended the War of the Roses at a joint cost of about 24,000 hideous deaths. The Lancastrians were destined to win the battle but lost when the wind changed and blew their arrows short of the enemy. I often wonder what the poor bloodied soldiers on both sides actually thought the battle was about? I suppose they fought because their chums fought – and that was the end of it. Of course, if they were on the side of the losing army, they could expect to be massacred.

Poor Lancastrians. Everything was going for them and still they blew it. Just like the Tories in the last election really.

**Ol’ Twinkly Eyes**

Those of you who read my blog may recall my hapless Mr Bean-ish attempt to teach volunteers at the Oxford Community Foodbank (CEF) how to solicit food outside Waitrose in Headington. As I was once a politician, I reckon I know how to persuade strangers. The volunteers were all set to watch the example of the master.

“All you have to do,” I said brightly, “is to be charming and persuasive!” I then chose an attractive customer who looked to be just my sort of woman: she probably shopped at Harrods.

“Good afternoon, Madam,” I smiled winsomely. “Please will you contribute some food to the foodbank?”

Hardly breaking her step, she snapped, “Bugger off!” And so that was that.

Undaunted, a few weeks back I gave an encore. I was worried – with, as it turned out, every reason – during the election that Jeremy Corbyn might slide into Downing Street because he is an excellent campaigner. I reckon that he and his team are just as dangerous as Donald Trump. Today’s young have little memory of our recent British
past, and of course it’s horribly clear many of them voted for that nice old man with the twinkly eyes because he made numbers of uncosted promises directed specifically at them.

But ZANE donors will recall the three-day week, the winter of discontent, the fact that leftist Labour policies have the opposite effect to that intended: rent controls mean fewer homes to rent, further employee “rights” and higher minimum wages bring unemployment, the unbridled power of trade unions is pernicious, nationalisation is costly, and raising taxation will bring less revenue. The idea that the prime minister should be a pacifist with past links to our nation’s enemies or that his would-be chancellor is a Marxist is profoundly upsetting. (Let’s forget about Diane Abbott for this is a family blog.)

Bullingdon Boy

I persuaded myself that the great Benyon had a duty to warn public hustings of the dangers that might lie ahead. And the main danger was that although Labour candidates like Sir Keir Starmer, Frank Field and Dan Jarvis are excellent moderate people, they are of course also standing as proxies for Corbyn and his crew. If enough people voted for the moderates
– and they nearly did so – we’d have Corbyn in charge.

The well-attended meeting was addressed by three female candidates. When I arose to make my points, I forgot that my voice when raised is a mix of Bullingdon and Montgomery addressing troops before Alamein. If I had been chatting to Ed Balls in a bar somewhere, it would have been fine, but as it was – in a room full of Remainers in deep mourning over Brexit – the tone could hardly have been worse.

Then to my horror I saw my dilemma was actually far worse than first imagined. The Labour candidate I was aiming at was delightful… and she had no hands. The whole room was murmuring admiration for her overcoming her ghastly disability, and rightly so.

Half a sentence in, I now know what the Titanic navigator must have felt like when he saw the iceberg. The temperature in the room dropped and furious faces glowered at me for being profoundly ungallant – as far as they were concerned, I was attempting to kick a disabled woman to death before their outraged eyes. As I struggled through a question and a half, it became clear that my performance was a hog-whimpering disaster. The excellent chairman knew I was way past the point of no return but what could he do anyway? He was kind later.

As I slouched out, I was cross with everyone, then with myself. I was then informed that my flies were undone. After apologising to anyone with a pulse, I asked a friend (do I have any left?) what he thought of it all?

“You came over as a total prick,” he said. Probably an understatement.

**Gobstoppers**

Am I rare in thoroughly disliking bus passes, free TV licences, child benefit and fuel allowances? It’s all so darn patronising. And as it’s our money that is being expensively recycled, it’s a total, costly con. If we are entitled for help with our families, why was it nicked in the first place? Tax allowances should have enabled us to keep our own money safely in the bank.

The “left” governments taxed us mercilessly and then the “right” inadvertently leave this nonsense in place because they wanted to signal how “nice” and caring they are by leaning to the left. So when some chancellor tries to simplify the ghastly mess that is our tax system, Middle England, like Violet Elizabeth Bott, stamps her foot and threatens to be sick.

The trouble is that once a democracy makes a concession, it’s impossible even to trim it. I recall way back during the three-day week and the miner’s strike, Ted Heath decided to bribe voters with a £10 “Christmas bonus” (he lost power anyway). Years later, a new chancellor failed to take it away as the cries of pain indicated the impossibility of Baby UK ever living within its means.
Gordon Brown was the worst practitioner of the dark art of bribery. He thought that because we are children of the state, pocket money should be doled out to us whenever he felt in the mood. In this way he succeeded in making us dependent on government handouts so we would beg for the next gobstopper and vote Labour. And for a while it worked. Now child benefit is paid on behalf of 14 million children, and 45 per cent of all non-retired households receive government handouts – an increase of almost 1 million over the last 10 years.

HMRC gives with one hand and snatches back with the other. Reform is essential before muddle overwhelms us.

Day 10: Glossop to Cheadle
See No Evil …

We walk along the Pennine Way, the loveliest route we have completed since we mastered the Pilgrim’s Way connecting Winchester and Salisbury. On the way, we see a beautiful flock of grey, very tough “Herdwick” sheep that come from the Lake District. The shepherd, a jolly man called Sam Sawyer, tells us that they will all have to be moved to cater for a scheme to hide electricity pylons. It all sounds very odd to us!

Reality Check
For guaranteeing sleepless nights, The Data Protection Act is in a class of its own. Extraordinary as it may seem, members of the public have won the right in law not to be contacted by charities outlining in graphic detail the effects of, say, starvation in Chad, a tsunami in Thailand, modern slavery or universal child abuse. If these citizens feel so strongly about it, why can’t they just bin the offending solicitations? No, they need a law to stop such unpleasantness crossing their doorstep in the first place.

No one has ever carefully explained to me why this law is necessary, or how it is that the USA gets on just fine without such regulation – but there it is. I would argue that instead of protection from solicitation, it would do the British public far more good if there were a “Legally Obliged to Read About Third-World Poverty And Other Disasters Six Times A Week Act”. Why not? After all, we are living in the UK. We are rich, fat and selfish (apart from ZANE donors, who are wonderful), and we should be daily forced to read charity solicitations reminding us that most people living on this planet just aren’t so darn lucky as we are. For example, slow, silent starvation is a painful and rather miserable process. And being caught in the middle of a civil war is ghastly. No one in the UK should be permitted to turn a blind eye to such miseries, their insularity underpinned by statute.

Each time I go to Zimbabwe, I am reminded that its people have no state benefits of any kind and no public healthcare: nothing at all. If you are ill and broke, you suffer, and then you die slowly or quickly. Bad luck, period.
When I get back to the UK, I am struck by how the political parties, especially during an election, are always trying to tell us just how much they love the NHS – and so much more than any other party. It’s childish. We know the public loves the NHS because “focus groups” tell us that in a society without God, the NHS has taken his (or her) place. And the NHS is only the start of it. My Zimbabwean friends who come to the UK tell me they are simply overwhelmed by the wealth of the houses, the profusion of goods in the shops, the fancy clothes people ponce about in (actually I think most of my fellow citizens look like temporary shelf stackers in Aldi, but let that pass), the unbelievable choice of the food stacked high in the stores, the very odour of wealth that hangs everywhere like a pall, and the overarching sense of safety and entitlement. One told me that a vast sign seems to hang over the UK: “Bad luck, Johnny Foreigner and other losers: the UK has won first prize in the lottery of life. We feel your pain, now go and get stuffed!”

Amidst this cornucopia of wealth and the blizzard of trashy entertainment
that fills our lives, ZANE tries to raise a bit of money to alleviate the misery and poverty in Zimbabwe.

ZANE gets no official help: in fact, quite the reverse. I reckon that today it is more or less impossible to start a charity and obey all the rules that appear stacked against any charitable entrepreneur, and that’s just the start. For over a third of our administrative meetings each week, we are obliged to spend valuable time dealing with the rules, laws and codes that are designed to regulate – and in reality, make it far harder – to raise money from the British public. We have to deal with the Fundraising Regulator, the Risk Register, the Annual Complaints Register, and then our old friend The Data Protection Act – and on it goes. Of course, the rules are written by people – civil servants and MPs – who have probably never started a charity or tried to fundraise in their lives.

As polite, well-ordered and law-abiding folk, we strive to obey these rules in spirit as well as letter. Of course, most of these regulations will never materially alter the behaviour of the real rogues who will just ignore them and laugh. Rules are a growth industry. As good manners, morality and trust decline, rules and regulations sprout everywhere to fill the vacuum. But knee-jerk reactions from our lawmakers – reacting to media pressure and high-profile cases like the very avoidable and absurd Kids Company collapse – have made life difficult for decent, law-abiding outfits like ZANE. Big charities of course have rooms filled with box tickers, but small charities like ZANE just have to manage it all with as good a grace and as much gallows humour as we can muster.

Ho Hum!

Freedom of Thought

Sad that no one who is a serious Christian with conventional views can hold a senior office in any political party. Your views will be analysed and you will be under attack; if your opinions fall short of what the liberal consensus thinks is “right”, you will be mocked then destroyed.

I have no idea what ZANE donors believe or do not believe, but whatever your views, if they are not acceptable you will be deemed to be thick and bigoted.

Today we all more or less have to think the same thing. In particular, we can’t be “pro-life” or against gay marriage. We all have to believe that there is no moral distinction between heterosexual and homosexual activity.

We have all forgotten what it means to be liberal in the best sense of the word: that is open-minded and generous to the views of others.
Day 11: Cheadle to Lymm

Shedding the Pounds

My trip to the important ZANE meeting in London was a success and I will report the implications in another blog at another time. Poor Jane and Moses were obliged to continue to walk through lovely countryside in slanting rain and mist. We spent the night with friends that I have not seen since my army days half a lifetime ago. They were most generous hosts and it was a joyous evening full of gossip and laughter.

The Wisdom of Moses

One of the many joys of this walk is Moses, our two-year old “cockerpoo” – the third dog to accompany Jane and me as we totter around the UK. The previous couple of dogs were Staffies, and although they were not everyone’s favourite, Jane and I loved them dearly – particularly Dinah, who looked as if the Almighty had bestowed special favour on her in terms of her shape and her colour (and she was as sharp as she was beautiful). She was run over near our house, and it was my fault entirely. Soft old thing that I am, I still water up when I think of her death.

What massively irritates me about Moses is that he regards me as a wholly dispensable add-on in his doggy life – perhaps good for a walk or two and an occasional pat – but he loves Jane to an obsessive degree. When I arrive home and Jane is not with me, he rushes over, then stands forlornly searching for her. Then when her absence becomes obvious, he slinks away throwing me reproachful looks over his shoulder for not being his pride and joy!

Fat Wars

Read any of the papers or glossies, and you will be overwhelmed by the vast number of weird diet regimes on offer. They are all based on the proposition that if you follow this or that diet, or use this or that device, you will end up slim, happy and looking like the slender, sun-kissed model on show in the ad.

The latest enticement that caught my eye came from a very attractive and clearly up-market girl holding a 10-inch Perspex pipe and with a large carrot stuck in her mouth. No reader, it was not a sex invitation or one of Trump’s playmates on the pull, but she was selling a device that incredibly purported to remove fat from food. I am convinced that this is yet another confidence trick cruelly pulled by a dewy eyed, slim, privately educated posh girl seeking to make a fortune by persuading sad shop girls who gorge on sugary food, factory pies, McDonalds and fizzy drinks that – at not inconsiderable cost – if they follow the diet and buy the plastic device, they will end up looking just like Keira Knightley.

When – after losing half their body weight – these girls remain skinny versions of who they were before (and very definitely do not morph into Ms Knightley), reality dawns: they are still plain and poor. The misery backlash more or less guarantees they will end up gorging on junk food from sheer
desperation and ending up the same size they were before they started – or possibly a few sizes larger. Then the cycle starts all over again.

**The Benyon Regime**

For free, I offer donors our family diet plan, guaranteed to keep anyone slim and reasonably fit!

Don’t eat anything out of packet, and don’t eat in front of a screen – unless you are watching your favourite soap (and then only indulge yourself once a week). Don’t drink more than one pint of beer at the pub, and don’t drink port or any brightly coloured, sweet, fizzy fluid. Never eat while standing up and please don’t scoff hamburgers on public transport or in the street. Always use cutlery and don’t munch anything out of a box. Avoid eating anything delivered to your door by a man on a motorbike – and the same goes for food passed through your car window.

Shun anything your dog would ignore. Don’t eat anything you “can’t resist” because you must; and don’t eat “because a little bit of what you fancy does you good” – because it doesn’t. There’s no point in buying food just because you saw it advertised on TV, particularly if it says it’s low in calories (it’s surely a lie). Never eat because you are bored or depressed.

And, last but not least, don’t eat anything your granny wouldn’t have recognised as food!

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**Day 12: Lymm to Widnes**

**The Great British Baby**

Shock, horror! Just before Lymm, a vast gay dog shot out of a thicket next to the canal, and poor innocent Moses found himself submerged beneath a labbymongrel determined to have his wicked way with him. Reader, when did you last try and prize a rampant dog off another whilst they were locked in a homosexual embrace? After heaving and cursing, we just about managed it, and the bounder escaped down the towpath. Poor Moses.
Having narrowly escaped a fate worse than death, he spent the rest of the day either coyly sitting down or peeping round corners to avoid the second coming.

**Pigs Might Fly**

As Dickens’ Wilkins Micawber says in *David Copperfield*: “Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure, nineteen pounds nineteen and six: result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result: misery.”

During the election, politicians talked about increasing expenditure as if the government had its own money – not taxpayers’ – and had to be badgered into spending it on the needs of an impoverished and deserving electorate. The party that borrowed the most was “generous and kind”: the one with modest plans was “mean and nasty”.

For heaven’s sake! Are we infants? If so, it’s our own fault for being credulous fools. As DH Lawrence writes:

*We can’t be too careful about the British Public*

*It gets bigger and bigger and its perambulator has to get bigger and bigger and its dummy-teat has to be made bigger and bigger and the job of changing its nappies gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger... And the sound of its howling gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger...*

So our party leaders are howled at by reporters:

“Don’t doctors and nurses deserve a pay rise?”

“How can benefits continue to be cut?”

“What about increased funding for the schools?”

It seems implicit that good politicians have to do the decent thing and spend more: only the mean and nasty embrace “austerity”.

The late US President Reagan once joked, “The US national debt is big enough to look after itself.” It was (I hope!) meant to be Ronnie’s little joke. But seriously, don’t voters even notice that the UK remains submerged in debt? Dear old Gordon Brown borrowed vast sums and we haven’t yet recovered from that binge. And an ageing population and creaking NHS promises further acute pressure on the public purse down the track.

So how can we save? It’s hard politically. Take the so-called “triple lock” on pensions, a Cameron gimmick he never believed he would have to deliver as he was sure he wouldn’t win the 2015 election. But today the “triple lock” is inevitably regarded as a “right”, and any reduction is described as an “assault on the elderly.”

Every day, HMG is spending money that it hasn’t got and no one seems to mind. But there has to be a day of reckoning. Every attempt to try and live within our means is described not as praiseworthy, but “barbaric”.

Change can only come after the questioners start asking politicians
not how much money are you going to spend, but how much are you going to save?

Gosh! Are those pink pigs flying past my window?

Heroes and Villains

My hero is a group: the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League (RCEL) headed up by Lieutenant Colonel Chris Warren. RCEL has partnered ZANE in Zimbabwe these past 13 years. The staff have always been diligent, consistent, hard-working and unfailingly kind and cooperative, and we have nothing but praise for them. As in all feisty relationships, we have had our “moments” – but with humour, hard work and some compromise, we have been able to make the lives of many thousands of veterans a good deal better than they otherwise would have been.

My villain is David Lammy, MP for Tottenham and mouthy “king of the far left’s class prejudice”. Lammy is trying to undermine retired judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick as the chairman of the Grenfell fire tragedy. He is leading a crusade to persuade vulnerable folk
affected by this disaster to presume the worse of those who are in authority, and to act on the assumption they are callous and that the “establishment” is undermining the poor.

Lammy concocts furious anger under a guise of social justice and he should be ashamed of himself. He asks, “whose side is Moore-Bick on?” perpetuating the evil idea that there are “sides” to take. One gets the idea from Lammy that there is only one truth here: that the fire was caused by a mean, vengeful government, and the “establishment” (usually Tories) is trying to screw the poor. Any other finding will be seen as a cover-up. There may have been a great deal of confusion and muddle, that of course is part of the human condition, but, in the main, the UK is a kindly place and decent too, and people are trying their best in often chaotic circumstances.

The “pick and mixing” of judges has to stop. The last time a judge was discarded was when the excellent Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss was forced out of the sex abuse investigation committee for being too “establishment” (recall the sex “crimes” hounding of Lord Bramall, Leon Brittan, Harvey Proctor, Cliff Richard and Ted Heath – all on the word of a sad fellow called Nick someone or other). She was replaced by Dame Lowell Goddard from New Zealand, who was established in a flat a heartbeat away from Harrods with four first-class return tickets to and from New Zealand and a pay package worth £500,000 a year. Goddard was said to be very rude to her staff and knew little about UK law. Then a quarter of the way through the investigation, she announced she was homesick and scarpered back to New Zealand.

Maybe she is free for the Grenfell investigation?

We have very little corruption in the UK and our judges are world class. If judges become conflicted, they will “recuse” themselves and they should be trusted to do so without a campaign to oust them. If these campaigns are seen to succeed, then the integrity of our court processes is weakened to the loss of us all. I experienced some attempts to undermine judges in the Lloyd’s of London debacle in the early 1990s, and it was as disgraceful then as it is now.

Day 13: Widnes to Liverpool

Wickedness and Virtue

A long walk to Liverpool Cathedral today marks the end of our trek. What a peerless and godly place the beautiful cathedral is.

On the way, we tramp through Huyton, the birthplace of Rex “the rotter” Harrison. Noel Coward said of him, “His real name is ‘Reg’, says it all really.”

It was here, in 1974, that I contested the seat of the former (and future) prime minister, Harold Wilson. He was a great man, one of the most talented
Labour politicians of his generation – and 1960s and 70s Labour was blessed by many talented big men and women: Nye Bevan, Ernest Bevin, Anthony Crosland, Peter Shore, Barbara Castle, Denis Healey ... What would they make of today’s lefty Labour party?

I think I recognise places we canvassed all those years ago, but perhaps, after all this time, this is just wishful thinking. Of course, Harold beat me by a vast margin. They hardly bothered to count votes in Huyton in those days: they just weighed Labour’s majority!

Lonely at the Top

Some years ago, Jane and I holidayed in the Scilly Isles, flying from Penzance Airport. By chance, there stood Mary Wilson who charmingly claimed to remember me. Then, to my surprise, she poured out her heart, lamenting that Harold – who was by then clasped in Alzheimer’s ghastly grip – was pretty much ignored by the current Labour party, his achievements long forgotten.

I tried to cheer her up by reminding her how Harold had held the party together – a mighty task at any time and one that requires great skill. He created The Open University, and, despite great pressure from US President Lyndon Johnson, steadfastly kept us from a bloody involvement in the Vietnam War. I suggested to Mary that politicians should be judged not merely for what they do but also for the follies they keep us away from. Being prime minister must be a lonely job.

Baby Blues

During lunch in a bar, I notice a woman breastfeeding her baby. What bothers me is that she doesn’t even look at the child during the process but is wholly preoccupied with her iPad – fascinated, I presume, by some game or other.

Surely this is profoundly sad. Ever since Adam delved and Eve span, mothers have focussed their love and attention on their children as they fed, sometimes softly singing to them, making faces at them, playing silly games like peek-a-boo, or admiring them devotedly – just loving them as the centre of the world. Now mothers are apparently addicted to their iPads and phones, their attention diverted away from their babies to some stupid game on an electronic machine.

I am sure that such a fundamental and profound change in behaviour is deeply significant and comes at great cost. It fills me with a sense of profound unease.

Shades of Grey

As soon as the extent of the terror attack at Westminster was known, several friends of the murderer, Khalid Masood, announced that he was a “lovely man, always smiling and joking.” However, after this “lovely” man checked out of his hotel on that March morning, off he went on the rampage in London, mowing down numerous people before stabbing a House of Commons policeman to death.
So he wasn’t such a nice man after all. When his crime record was searched, it was discovered that he had “form”, and had been jailed in 2003 for possession of a knife. At that time, another friend claimed: “This is a great shock to me ... It’s hard to take in that this is the same bloke.”

In a local paper, there was a school picture of smiling Masood with a statement underneath: “His arms folded, he gives no clue as to the murderous path he will take.”

Did they expect him to scowl and hold up a sign reading, “Here stands a future serial murderer”? The assumption that external appearances or everyday behaviour are any sort of guide to the full extent of a person’s intentions is clearly dotty. Of course, unless he was bonkers, Masood would have done his utmost to hide the plans that were likely to bring horror to all he encountered on his murderous enterprise. The illusion held by many today is that we are either wholly good or wholly bad. This notion has a long genesis. Apparently Socrates, Plato and Aristotle believed in the “unity of the virtues”, insisting that any bad person was bound to possess the totality of wickedness, and
a “good” person was bound to possess not just some, but all the virtues.

This attitude is represented in the 1950s film *High Noon*. There stands the epitome of virtue and courage, Marshall Will Kane (Gary Cooper), pitted against Frank Miller, cast as the essence of wickedness. The Kane character is, of course, perched on the moral high ground. Off set, this “pure” image was somewhat tarnished as actor Gary Cooper was having a raunchy affair with his leading lady, Grace Kelly. So when reality kicks in, morals often squeak in second – what’s new?

Recently we learnt of the death of the one-time head of the IRA, Martin McGuinness. In his early life, he was a widow maker on an industrial scale, responsible for many hundreds of deaths and atrocities. Then terrorist McGuinness suddenly decided to go into peace-making politics, and having arranged an amnesty for himself and his cronies, was promoted to hero and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

His funeral was attended by Alastair Campbell – who wrote a flowery tribute outlining his latter-day virtues in the *Guardian* – and Bill Clinton, who told the weeping congregation what delightful company Martin had been. Some other people – like Norman Tebbit, whose wife Margaret has been crippled since 1984 as a direct result of the bomb planted (at McGuinness’s supposed command) in the Brighton Grand Hotel – had less complimentary things to say. McGuinness never said he was sorry. Apparently when faced with awkward questions, he let it be known that the “peace process” was merely the continuation of terrorist activity by other means, and so as far as he was concerned there was nothing to be sorry about: “We all have blood on our hands, don’t we?” was the sentiment he offered to deflect hard questions.

So McGuinness was not only a cold-eyed killer but he was also capable of great acts of kindness, and devotedly looked after his wife and four children.

**Jekyll and Hyde**

Of course, a mix of wickedness and virtue is at the heart of most of Shakespeare’s plays. None of his characters is wholly virtuous or villainous either. In recent times, Hitler’s secretaries disclosed what a delightful, kind and considerate boss he was. And Hitler’s sidekick, Heinrich Himmler – the SS killer who devised the “Final Solution” that killed 6 million Jews – was the subject of a film called *The Decent One*, which showed the charming and tender correspondence between him, his wife and children. Himmler also expressed great concern about the effect mass murder was having on his gassing and shooting troops.

That depravity and decency can coexist in individuals is demonstrated by Robert Louis Stevenson in *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which I wrote about in my last commentary.
How tidy it would be if we could collect all the good guys in one camp and all the evil ones in another. However, as Solzhenitsyn wrote, there is a thread of evil that runs through the hearts of all men (and women too).

The Choice
Where does all this leave us? How self-aware are we? I have often thanked God that I wasn’t born German a generation or two earlier, for in my prime I was blond, thin-lipped and blue eyed, all straight from central casting. I could have played a credible Nazi officer in any of the 1950s Second World War black and white films.

But what about real life? On our last French holiday, I visited Oradour Sur Glane, where, on 10 June 1944, the Das Reich battalion under Sturmbannführer Adolf Diekmann massacred over 600 people as reprisal for some trivial offence or other. Later, of course, it was discovered that Oradour was the wrong village, but what did that matter to the Nazis in wartime when lives were so cheap and soldiers brutalised? One of the defences offered at the 1946 trial of the surviving murderers was that this massacre was nothing compared to the ghastly crimes conducted in Eastern Russia only a few months before.

On the command of President de Gaulle, Oradour remains untouched these past decades, a silent memorial to the fallen French civilians of the Second World War.

I occasionally imagine myself aged 19 or so, and under Diekmann’s command. Ordered to shoot hundreds of women and children, what would I do? Rather than be shot myself, I suspect I would obey the order.

That would make me a war criminal, a monster rightly to be hunted down like a dog.

I think that the sentence in the Lord’s Prayer, “Lead me not into temptation” is a prayer to Almighty God that we might be spared facing such soul-shattering choices.

So virtuous reader, what would you have done in such a situation? How depraved might you have become if cruel circumstances had obliged you to face an unspeakable choice? And if you had machine-gunned innocent women and children, would your childhood and university friends all say how jolly and kind you usually were, and then announce how surprised they were that you – of all people – had turned out to be a soulless mass murderer?
The Day After

Thanks...

We have enjoyed great hospitality from generous hosts. I think it is invidious to start naming you for it becomes rather like a visitor’s book, trying to think of something original to write that is markedly different each time – but my heartfelt thanks to all of you.

Thanks too to all our generous donors. Without you all, we have no mission.

Allow me to single out the following for particular thanks:

Markus, our wonderful driver and support from Bulawayo. A delightful and kind man – and a great driver.

ZANE trustee Georgie Knaggs and her husband, Charlie, who lifted our morale at the end of the walk.

My love and grateful thanks to Jane who puts up with my grumpiness with great grace.

And a special mention for Moses, a dog who gladdens the heart of all who meet him.

At the start of my blog, I dedicated this walk to a lady I met recently in Harare, one so poor that the mere offer of milk in her tea brought her (and by way of her reaction, me) to tears. So my final thanks to her and all of ZANE’s grateful beneficiaries whose quiet bravery and stoicism in the face of such hardship inspired us every step of the way.

The views expressed are those of Tom Benyon and not the charity, ZANE.

Cartoons by Tony Husband
John Simpson CBE  World Editor of the BBC
I have seen a little bit of ZANE’s work on the ground and from what I have seen it is very, very impressive . . . ZANE is one of those lovely organisations that make a little bit of money go a long, long way. ZANE is a good cause and the money is properly and well spent.

Henry Olonga  Former Zimbabwe International Cricketer
Having grown up in Zimbabwe and after many years of involvement with ZANE, I can state categorically that it is an excellent organisation. The team on the ground know each individual they help, and they treat the old, sick and afflicted with kindness and compassion. I have no hesitation in recommending that you support this worthy cause.

Nick Price  Zimbabwean Professional Golfer
As a Zimbabwean who has represented my country on many occasions, I am saddened by the state of my beautiful homeland. If it wasn’t for ZANE, the situation would be worse for many thousands of desperate people blighted by hunger, lack of access to education and ill health. ZANE provides a lifeline to these people and its efficiency and effectiveness is commendable.

US Ambassador James D McGee (Ret)
The people of Zimbabwe have so very little to be thankful for, but the great work done by ZANE is bringing relief and improved health to many who had no hope for a better tomorrow. Organisations such as ZANE are critical in providing assistance to those in need.

Matthew E K Neuhaus  Australian Ambassador, Australian Embassy, Zimbabwe
ZANE does invaluable, literally lifesaving work in Zimbabwe in providing essential support for those who can no longer help themselves - especially amongst our senior citizens. As ZANE extends its fundraising activities to Australia, I am pleased to endorse the importance of its work and guarantee that the money raised goes where it is needed most. I encourage fellow Australians to support them generously.

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick CBE  Chairman, ZANE Council of Reference
ZANE’s work in Zimbabwe provides an essential lifeline of support for those who cannot help themselves. It is a wonderful charity and the money goes where it’s needed.
1 **ZANE** builds a personal relationship with every one of the 2,600 elderly, often very lonely, people to whom we give aid, support and encouragement. Only those really in need of assistance receive it.

2 **ZANE** provides the largest social services network in Zimbabwe.

3 Donors are able to choose which aspect of **ZANE's** mission they plan to support.

4 Recently **ZANE** was the Telegraph Group Overseas Charity of the year.

5 **ZANE** is looking after over 600 aged and frail veterans who fought for the Crown in WW2, Malaya, Korea and Aden. Despite their loyal service to the UK, the overwhelming majority are living with insufficient food and no healthcare cover whatsoever.

6 **ZANE** runs training initiatives and supplies seed-funding to enable self-help businesses and food production in impoverished communities in Zimbabwe.

7 **ZANE** funded the first clubfoot correction programme in Zimbabwe. Eleven treatment centres have been established and over 2,200 children have received treatment to date.

8 **ZANE** receives no aid from the government and relies wholly on support from private donors.

9 An independent consultancy reviewed **ZANE** and the report stated: “The charity thrives on its responsiveness, flexibility and lack of bureaucracy. Operationally **ZANE** is frugal, focused and effective in delivering aid to the needy.”
I would like to make a regular gift via Direct Debit of £ every month OR £ quarterly
OR £ annually. Please debit the above amount from my account on or around the
(tick as appropriate) 1st or 15th of (month)

Please tick the box below and make this gift and any donations made in the future, or made in the past 4 years, worth 25% more with Gift Aid. Gift Aid is reclaimed by ZANE from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or Capital Gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all of my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Preferred use of gift: Trustees’ Discretion ☐, Pensioner Work ☐, Impoverished Communities ☐, Clubfoot ☒

I would like to make a regular gift via Direct Debit of £ every month OR £ quarterly OR £ annually. Please debit the above amount from my account on or around the (tick as appropriate) 1st or 15th of (month)

Please notify ZANE if you
• Want to cancel this declaration
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Please complete this form and send it to: FREEPOST RSBR-YLRX-UBUH, ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

ZANE:
Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Please fill in the form and send to: ZANE: FREEPOST RSBR-YLRX-UBUH, ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY.

If a specified project is fully funded, donations will be used where most needed. We like to keep you updated with ZANE’s work and will keep your details so we can contact you in the future about our activities and how you can support us. ZANE will never share your details with any third party. If you would rather not hear about ZANE’s work in the future, please tick here ☐.

DONATE BY CHEQUE OR CARD

I enclose a cheque for £

cheque payable to “ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency” or please debit my Debit/Credit Card for £

Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ CAF ☐ Debit ☐ Name on Card

Card no

Start date Expiry date Issue No Security Code
To donate by post, fill in form overleaf

Please detach form and post in an envelope to:
Freepost RSBR-YLRX-UBUH
ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY England
If you use a stamp, ZANE will be very grateful for the postage saved.