



Monday 1st December at 1000hrs
Shropshire Seniors on Town Walls

Minutes

- **Introduction**

This was the biggest turnout yet, with 17 members present out of 18 – Graham having sent his apologies. Two new members arriving were Sue Johnston and Guy Woodward.

- **Discussion Topics**

A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

Should we restrict immigration from the EU?

- Pam set us off by announcing that Enoch Powell, he of the ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech which ignited so much anti-immigrant feeling in the 1960s, was the very same minister who in the fifties, encouraged immigration from the West Indies – largely to work in the newly-formed NHS, thus showing how fickle the attitudes to immigration were.
- The government in 1978 held a referendum which resulted in a resounding ‘Yes’ to the principal tenet of free movement of labour in the newly-formed EU. However, it was Germany who separated the idea of freedom of movement and the provision of benefits and it may be the latter which most people argue against. Of course there were many fewer countries in the EU in 1978 and now there are many more and poorer countries who, although they may not cause a huge increase in benefits paid out, put a huge strain on the NHS, schools and other services.
- As to why immigrants seem to be so attracted to the UK, rather than, say France, two reasons were put forward: the generous benefits system and the English language itself.
- However, even if we refused immigration altogether, it would not stop people coming into the country. You only have to think of the USA who are troubled immensely with illegal immigrants from over their land borders with Mexico.
- After the ping-pong of facts and opinions for and against, we had some voting. We could only vote for one of the following statements:
 - I would restrict the numbers of immigrants into the country - 6 votes
 - I would not restrict numbers but I would restrict benefits – 8 votes
 - I would make no changes to the present rules: - 3 votes
- And finally, someone remarked that of course we have no issues with immigrants here in Shrewsbury, because it’s such an old-fashioned, off-the-beaten-track town. So we had another count: of ‘incomers’ to Shrewsbury. There were 14 out of 17. Yes, but, often you can’t choose where to work, so how many of those 14 came because of

work? There were 3 of those. So 11 out of 17 came voluntarily to live here in mediaeval Shrewsbury.

Is the 38 degree website the new democracy?

- This is a website where people register their 'causes' and amass support directly online, from where it can come to the attention of the government or whoever is the responsible body and can make changes happen. The first reaction was to remark that if most people have never heard of this website then it isn't democracy, but the riposte was that lots of people don't know about the traditional workings of government and democracy.
- There was some cynicism for traditional democracy anyway, since some members agreed that 'he who shouts loudest wins' in traditional democracy and therefore this website idea is only following the same pattern. Then someone offered the information that the government has its own website which is open to 'causes' and promises to discuss any cause which gains enough support online.
- A rather astute quote from G B Shaw was thrown into the ring: 'Democracy only works if the majority of people are intelligent', to which was added, 'Democracy only works if everyone participates'. This provoked another count and the majority of the room voted for obligatory voting.

Should war widows retain their pension if they re-marry?

- A recent act of parliament has been passed to allow military widows to keep their widow's pension if they re-marry thus treating them differently from other widows. Some sympathy was given to the plight of the war widow who, people said, often move frequently around the country and abroad to follow their spouse, which restricts their careers and often prevents them accruing work pensions.
- But this is also true of a lot of wives who move around to follow their husband's career moves, was the reply.
- It didn't take long to ascertain that a large majority of us felt that it should be one rule for all where the widow's pensions are concerned.

At what age should a child be told the truth about Santa Claus?

- Back to basics with this one as we went over the origins of Santa i.e. Father Christmas, or rather St Nicholas, and what exactly he has to do with the story of Jesus Christ. The only connection we could find was the fact that St Nicholas was supposed to have given out presents to the poor in his own country of the present-day Turkey. So the connection with Christianity was seen to be very weak.... and yet, heart-rending stories of children hanging on for dear life to the legend of Father Christmas as he brought presents, were thick on the ground. Sometimes the child involved was heart-broken when told of the non-existence of their annual provider of presents, and sometimes the child admitted to having gone along with the story for obvious reasons. We didn't really come to an agreement on the age at which to break the sad news, some people not wanting to participate in the untruth in the first place.
- In fact, the whole commercialisation of Christmas, especially the intensifier of 'Black Friday' to create yet more buyers' remorse come Boxing Day, got our temperatures up somewhat.

- **Future Discussion Topics**

After migrating to the Coach and Horses for drinks and chips, we forgot to decide upon discussion topics for January 2015. Please email me with your suggestions.

- **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Monday 5th January 2015 at 1000hrs**. As yet, I have not secured a replacement but I am holding out for facilities in the town centre with parking. Please email me with your suggestions.

I hope to see you at the Lord Hill U3A Christmas party, which is on Monday 15th December. Meanwhile, I will have to search out another venue for our cafe society meetings. What can I say? We are having such a good time at our meetings that the noise is not music to the ears of the staff at Shropshire Seniors (we are obviously in our second youth!) and we must find elsewhere.

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