

THE PARTY OF OPPORTUNITY

Foreword by **The Rt Hon Sir John Major KG CH**

Compiled by **David Amess MP**

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RENEWAL



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WHAT DOES THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OFFER A WORKING CLASS KID FROM BRIXTON?



THEY MADE HIM PRIME MINISTER.

No wonder John Major believes everyone should have an equal opportunity

CONSERVATIVE ☒

FOREWORD

THE RT HON SIR JOHN MAJOR KG CH

CLASSLESS SOCIETY

Many years ago, I spoke of a classless society. By that, I meant a society in which anyone from any background or culture could rise as high as hard work and ability could take them.

To achieve this, we must follow our better instincts and define ourselves by what we *for*: not what we are *against*. We must reach out to everyone of every background in every part of our country. And we must speak *to* them, not *at* them. We must also speak for them, not sectional interests.

Many in our society need help but, to deliver it, we must build a strong economy. Only national wealth can ease poverty, pay for social care and create jobs.

From the wreckage of the financial crisis bequeathed to us, that is what we Conservatives know must be done.

And, as in the past, we must do so for people of *all* classes: it is our purpose, our privilege and our duty.



March 2014

INTRODUCTION

BY DAVID SKELTON

Growing up in the North Eastern steel town of Consett probably isn't what many people regard as a "typical" Conservative upbringing. It's even less obvious given that my grandparents on my mother's side were thoroughly red, from a mining family, who generally believed in two religions - Methodism and Socialism, with one, arguably, influencing the other.

But the Labour Party of today is a million miles away from the one that my grandparents had such reverence for. Despite all the hope that was invested in them in 1997, Labour spent 13 years taking the North East and their "heartlands" for granted, betting the bank on the City of London, doing little to provide the infrastructure that the North needed and regarding the North as a useful place to "parachute" their preferred candidates. They also did nothing to crack down on the practices that allowed vested interests to prey on the poorest. The result was a widening North-South divide, higher unemployment, widening inequality, falling social mobility and many voters turning their backs on politics altogether.

Labour were once rooted in working class communities, but today that couldn't be further from the truth. Where once Herbert Morrison rejected British membership of the embryonic Common Market because the "Durham miners wouldn't wear it", today's Labour politicians often exhibit a sniffy, snobbish disdain for the views of the children and grandchildren of those Durham miners. Little wonder that Labour's vote amongst the skilled working class has halved since 1997. Now, as Conservatives we need to shout from the rooftops that the Conservative Party is their natural home.

Some commentators suggest that UKIP will focus on these disenchanted working class voters. But, as Conservatives, we need to show to working people and their families that we're creating a society and an economy that works for

everybody and helps them fulfil their aspirations. Continuing to make this positive message will quickly see off UKIP's narrow, negative message and their harking for a golden age that never was.

This booklet brings together a number of MPs who were born into working class households but are now proud Conservatives. It shows that while Labour is more often the political wing of the Hampstead coffee shop, it's now the Conservatives who are the real workers' party and it's the Conservatives who will increasingly be the party of choice of the working people of Britain. This paper has a superb line up of passionate Conservatives and we'd like to thank David Amess for pulling together such a fine selection of writers, including such first rate Ministers as Patrick McLoughlin, Sajid Javid, Mike Penning and Mark Francois.

The views of the contributors to this paper aren't always something that Renewal would agree with and I'm sure they don't agree with everything that we say. But there is real common ground that Conservatives believe, to repeat Disraeli's dictum, in "trusting the people" - we don't believe that the man in Whitehall knows best. We're all proud Conservatives because we believe that Conservatism is about elevating the condition of the people, maintaining our institutions and a real sense of patriotism and national pride. At Renewal, we're proud to bring together such a range of inspiring voices - all showing why Conservatives are now the peoples' party.

As Conservatives, we believe in the unity of the nation not in the narrow division of class. Today's party is the party for everybody in society, from every walk of life, ignoring the silly obsession of some in the media with social class. We remember that Conservatives who have done the most for the poorest, from Lord Shaftesbury and Randolph Churchill to Michael Heseltine didn't necessarily come from working class backgrounds. We also remember that Harold Macmillan, the Conservative who appealed most to working class voters was by no means working class himself. Social class doesn't matter, but using power to help working class people matters a lot. And that's what Conservatives have done and are doing.

We're right be proud to belong to a party that extended the franchise to working class voters, gave the right to picket and the right to a ballot to trade unionists and was responsible for far reaching measures to improve the conditions of the poorest. We're proud to belong to a party that demolished the slums, built millions of new houses, gave council house tenants the right to buy their own

home and gave millions of citizens the right to participate in a share owning democracy. We're proud to have a contribution from Sir John Major, who showed what Conservatives could do for "a working class boy from Brixton". And we're proud of being in a Party that in Government is lifting the poorest out of tax, cutting fuel duty, increasing the minimum wage, reviving manufacturing, capping payday loans, reducing inequality to its lowest level for almost 30 years, providing the train connections we need and fighting for full employment.

A common thread that runs through all of the contributions is the importance of education and a Conservative belief in opportunity and making the most of your potential. The Conservatives have been and remain the party of opportunity. It's the education reforms of Michael Gove that really makes us stand out as the workers' party. Labour seem happy with a status quo that lets down some of the poorest and means that less than 30 per cent of white British boys leave school with five or more A-C's at GCSE. By contrast, Conservatives don't think that second best is good enough and reforms aimed to improve the life chances of the poorest, shamefully opposed by Labour, will be one of this Government's great legacies.

All of these achievements will make an important difference to working people. Of course, there's still more to be done – we can't repair the damage of a shattered economy overnight. We have to ensure that we build enough houses to make good the Conservative dream of a 'home of your own' for everybody, continue to boost vocational training and apprenticeships and help small businesses to create more jobs. We also need to make sure that our towns and cities have the infrastructure they need to ensure that prosperity is spread to every part of the country.

My Grandparents were passionate socialists because they thought that Labour were rooted in their communities and offered the best hope for the future. That's no longer the case – Labour's hope has been replaced by disappointment and complacency. This booklet shows that it's now Conservatives who are pointing the way towards a brighter future. The leader of the Boilermakers' Union said of Disraeli that the Conservatives had done more for the working class in 5 years than the Liberals had in 50. Equally, it can be said of David Cameron that the Conservatives have done more for working people in four years than New Labour did in thirteen.

DAVID SKELTON is Director of Renewal

NIGEL ADAMS MP

Not all members of my family were overly pleased when I decided to enter the political world and particularly with my choice of Party. I was at my Uncle John's funeral a few years back and as an ex-miner, the wake was held at the Grimethorpe Miners Welfare Institute. A cousin, who I had not seen for some years fixed me with a steely glare, shook my hand and said, "Nigel lad, thy grandfatha' would be turning in his grave if he knew tha' was a Tory." I was slightly taken aback but understood where he was coming from. However, I would like to think that secretly he would be rather proud that one of his grandchildren had been elected as a Member of Parliament, irrespective of Party!



One of my earliest pre-school memories is accompanying my mother to the nearby Catholic School where she worked as a part time cleaner. Fast forward forty years and I was the guest speaker at the school's annual prizegiving evening, invited as the newly elected Member of Parliament for Selby and Ainsty.

MP's will tell you different stories about when they became involved in or aware of politics and many are shaped politically by events from childhood. The one event which I recall was when my parents were turned down for a grant to install central heating at our home and with the intervention of the local Conservative MP, Michael Alison, the decision was overturned and the need to share a bed with my brother and bedroom windows frosted on the inside were alleviated. This help from our MP had a huge effect on our family and in fact, my dad still has the letter from Michael Alison on House of Commons notepaper notifying them of the success of their appeal. It also influenced me in so much that

from that moment on, I knew that a Member of Parliament could have a positive impact on ordinary people's lives.

It was a cruel twist of fate that saw me raised in North Yorkshire as both my parents were from the Labour dominated South Yorkshire mining villages of Grimethorpe and Thurnscoe where my grandparents, uncles and nephews were employed in the coal mining industry. My dad had an accident at work aged 17, which left him with terrible leg injuries and unable to work in the pit or mills so his employer helped the newly married couple relocate to near Selby where he was given a job at a pet food wholesaler.

Most of my school holidays were spent with my dad at work or occasionally helping my mother out looking after old folks in the village as she was now employed as a part-time home help. Two week summer holidays were usually taken in Great Yarmouth where a static caravan was rented and having made the horrific seven hour journey, we then hoped it wouldn't rain for the whole fortnight.

I knew that lack of money was always an issue in our house and I am aware that my parents struggled to make ends meet but they never complained, they simply worked hard and instilled the same ethos into their children. Growing up in a family where money was scarce meant that you did not expect much and I suppose nowadays, some well meaning group would say that I was brought up in poverty, but it certainly didn't feel that way. However, the knowledge that my first pair of football boots and my first bike were cast offs from school friends did motivate me in my later business career.

In the late seventies, my dad was made redundant and this period was deeply traumatic as the only wage coming into the house was my mother's part-time income. This period coincided with the emergence of Margaret Thatcher and whilst politics was rarely discussed in our house apart from the odd mention of the saintly Michael Alison (who went on to become Mrs Thatcher's PPS) Britain at the time was experiencing decline, industrial action and international ridicule. Margaret Thatcher reached out to households like ours, she pushed the sell-off of council houses, she gave working class people the opportunity to own shares for the first time and she took on special interests intent on grinding the country to a halt. Her vision was simple; create a property owning democracy that encouraged and did not frown upon aspiration. She created a country where

people had a real stake in society and it did not matter where you were from, who your parents were, or which school you went to, you had the opportunity to get on in life. It was around this time that I realised that the Conservatives were the Party for me.

It's a huge honour to represent the constituency where I was brought up and have lived most of my life and I consider my upbringing a huge advantage in my work as an MP.

NIGEL ADAMS was elected as Member of Parliament for Selby and Ainsty in May 2010 with a majority of 12,265 votes. Aged 26, he set up his own telecommunications business with a £20 a week government grant. Six years later, the company was bought by a PLC. Nigel is married with four children.

DAVID AMESS MP

I was born in the East End of London, in Plaistow, in 1952, the second of two children. My father was an electrician and my mother a Tea Lady, a Dinner Lady and before that a “Court Dress Maker” following her time serving in the Land Army. The family home was a little terraced house where my widowed mother still lives, ironically called Disraeli Terrace.

Apparently in the Second World War the roof of the property was blown off by a “Doodlebug” landing and an air raid shelter was at the bottom of the small garden. As a child my family had little money but a strong work ethic, which meant that every penny counted. We had no bathroom (the tin bath used to hang on the wall outside), an outside toilet, and a larder instead of a refrigerator. We didn’t have a washing machine, but had a scrubbing board and we didn’t have a telephone we just threw the window opened and shouted loudly at one another. So when I think of my children today, they would regard me as having been born into poverty. It certainly didn’t feel like that at the time, I had a very happy childhood. I walked to school every day, a couple of miles there, a couple of miles back. In my infant and primary schools we had classes of 52 children. The teachers were very dedicated and I owe them so much, particularly when one identified to my mother that I had a speech defect and I ended up attending a speech therapy clinic for two years to stop my stutter. We could spell properly, knew our times tables and could write clearly. I then went onto a Catholic Secondary School, having taken the 11-Plus into the Grammar Stream.

Newham produced the first ever Labour Member of Parliament, Keir Hardie. Everything was Labour; one hundred per cent Labour Council, a Labour GLC Member and a Labour Member of Parliament who had been there for forty



years. So the simple reason I became a Conservative was that I was absolutely fed up with local Labour politicians describing how bad everything was, I wanted them to do something about it. I felt the Conservative Party's policies, certainly under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher were best placed to meet people's aspirations, to "get on" in life, and make the most of opportunities. So when I became the Member of Parliament for Basildon I was completely at home with lots of Eastenders who wanted to be upwardly mobile and fulfil their aspirations. Whether it was Right-to-Buy, share ownership or support for private enterprise, all of these policies and more were extremely popular with residents who had a working class background. Since those "heady days" at my first election more than thirty years ago much has changed. Prosperity has increased and with that people's aspirations.

For the Conservative Party to win the next election it is essential that we retain and increase Working Class support throughout the length and breadth of our country. We need to develop and enhance policies that fulfil people's aspirations in terms of housing, employment, lifestyle and opportunities generally.

DAVID AMESS is the Member of Parliament for Southend West. Between 1983 and 1997 he was Member of Parliament for Basildon.

ANDREW BINGHAM MP

I was brought up in a non-political household. My parents were always floating voters, although politics was never the talk around the breakfast table. My paternal grandfather was a chef, who on one occasion had the honour of making a cake for Nikita Khrushchev, and my maternal Grandfather was a bus driver. My late father was trained as an electrician whilst my Mum looked after the family home and kept my brother and I in check!



My education was at the local schools, leaving what was then Long Lane Comprehensive School at 16 before spending two years training to be a chef, a job I did for some three years after leaving college. Through a combination of events, I started to help my father out in a business he had recently started, selling engineering equipment to industry across the north west of England. It was in this job that I realised the full benefit of the private sector, how through someone's own efforts they can improve their life and those around them, the need for aspiration and opportunity and how it can motivate people. Our business was a very small business, only ever employing four or five people but I dealt with companies from the smallest sole trader to the big multinationals.

I was 16 when Margaret Thatcher was elected in 1979 and as I watched the successive Thatcher Governments I began to form my own political views. I am not the product of a political doctrine handed down by my parents, indeed I believe my Grandparents were Labour voters but I have come to my own views on politics. I always revile at the terms of 'posh Tories'. Anyone who has met me will know I am not posh. I am not from a privileged background, indeed I didn't even attend University. My political philosophy has been built up through my own life experiences.

I have seen businessmen and women start businesses. I have seen them start from very humble beginnings and through hard work and effort build them into thriving and sometimes multi-million pound organisations. I have seen these entrepreneurs have the worry and the stress of building businesses and creating employment and wealth. As one business owner once told me, “I don’t have one mortgage, I have 50 – the 50 people who rely on me for their income”.

As I have seen these people, I have built the belief that the state should be no more than a hand on the tiller, a light touch to allow these people to thrive. The heavy hand of the state can stifle and suffocate and we should never lose sight of the fact – it is the revenues of the private sector that fund the public sector, so if we want good public services we need a thriving private sector.

As we encourage business and commerce we can give people aspiration, a will to succeed and a belief that the state will not stand in their way, moreover, encourage them and facilitate their ambitions as far as is possible.

I am incredibly fortunate to be the Member of Parliament for where I was born in the High Peak, but I had an aspiration borne out of a speech by Margaret Thatcher who said that she would like to see more people in politics that have come from a working background. She put the thought in my mind, and the aspiration in my heart. It is that belief and aspiration that we need to build within people. It is a Conservative philosophy; freedom, within a society and its values, to do what you wish and to fulfil your dreams, ambitions and potential. That is why I am a Conservative and as a Conservative Member of Parliament from a working background I can say clearly that the Conservative Party can be and is the Party of the working man and woman who has an ambition for a better life for them and their family.

ANDREW BINGHAM is Member of Parliament for High Peak.

JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE MP

I was born and bred in Sheffield. My father was a bricklayer and my mother a part-time sales assistant at Woolworths. There has never been any doubt in my mind that it is the Conservative Party who support ordinary hard-working people who want to make the best of themselves.

In 1983 my parents decided to buy their council house. It changed their lives. It bought them independence and it gave them the opportunity to move onto something better.

This was a policy vigorously opposed by the Labour council in Sheffield, who did all they could to stop them. Why would a Party that claims to be the Party of the worker stand in the way of the ambition of people to own their own home? They think that people should be grateful for what they are given by the State. We believe we should do all we can to give people opportunity to improve things for themselves and their families.

The same thing can be seen in their approach to schools. I was fortunate to attend a good comprehensive school which set me up to attend Durham University. Too often though comprehensives were allowed to become mediocre, which meant that over time fewer people with my background were able to go to good universities. The Academies programme is giving us a real chance to boost parental choice and diversity in education provision so that all children will have access to an education which will equip them with a good foundation for life.

But the most important reason I support the Conservatives is tax. We instinctively believe that people should keep more of what they earn to spend as they see fit. And that is the major fault line in British politics. Labour believes that the State



knows best and that the state has a god-given right to take as much as they want to spend. We believe that individuals know best for themselves and their families.

For most people much of what they take home is spent on essentials, on putting food on the table, on keeping the house warm and on paying the rent or mortgage. So each pound we give or take away in tax makes a real difference. That is why I am really clear that reducing taxes is the best thing we can do to support working people and why working people are best served by the Conservatives. In my view no one should be paying tax until they are earning a living wage. We should continue with increasing the personal tax allowance and taking more and more lower paid workers out of work altogether.

It has been a source of frustration for many working people that while they work hard, others seem to enjoy a good lifestyle living on benefits. That has to stop. Taxpayers cannot afford it. It is on welfare where Labour have let down working people most. The Benefits system has encouraged welfare dependency and generations have been failed by the failure to tackle worklessness. It will take a time to fix, but we fail society if we do not work towards a country where all have the dignity afforded by independence and self-reliance. It is why we need a Majority Conservative Government.

[JACKIE DOYLE-PRICE](#) is Member of Parliament for Thurrock

RT HON MARK FRANCOIS MP

I was born in Islington, north London, in 1965, the son of working class parents. My father, Reginald Francois, was an engineer who had fought in the Royal Navy in the Second World War (he was on a minesweeper on D Day). My mother, Anna Carloni, was Italian and met my dad after coming to the UK as an au pair in the early 1960s.

We moved out to Essex in 1971 and settled in the New Town of Basildon, much of which comprised ex-Londoners. I attended St Nicholas comprehensive school in Basildon, which was a ten minute walk from the council estate that we lived on. I had a modest but very happy childhood with two loving parents.

My first political thought was probably during 1973 “three day week”, when the lights suddenly went out and the TV failed during a power cut, right in the middle of an England World Cup qualifier. When I inquired of my father what had happened he simply replied “It’s the unions, son” to which I retorted that I didn’t know who they were but it seemed pretty unfair that they wanted to stop people simply enjoying the football!

However, what really brought me to politics was the defence issue. I was fascinated by the Second World War (not least because my dad had fought in it) and my bedroom was full of Airfix models and plastic soldiers. As I grew into my teens I began to read about the rise of Adolf Hitler, the errors of Appeasement and the intriguing figure of Winston Churchill - who predicted what was coming but whom, initially at least, very few in the post Great War Establishment wanted to believe.

The more I read about Churchill and the House of Commons, in which he made such great speeches, the more fascinated I became. By the time I was around thirteen I had decided that I wanted to become a Member of Parliament, which



delighted my father when I told him. About a year later he sadly passed away.

I was in the Sixth form at school and then Bristol University in the early to mid 1980s, when CND were again on the march and there was much debate about cruise missiles and Trident. From what I had read about history it seemed to me that these people, and their Labour Party fellow travellers under Michael Foot, were perhaps well meaning but also hopelessly naive. In contrast, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party believed in strong defences, NATO, the nuclear deterrent - and stood up to Argentina over the Falkland Islands as well.

However, I found that I also instinctively agreed with the Conservatives about other things as well - their emphasis on hard work and enterprise, their belief in the Nation State and their willingness to promote aspiration, for instance by allowing working class people a chance to buy their own council houses. This was one of our best ever policies and one which was tremendously popular in Basildon, with its large number of council estates.

My father had worked overtime to buy me an Encyclopaedia Britannica, which greatly assisted my studies. I was one of only two out of the 226 in my original year group from St Nicholas to make it to university - and I have held strong views about the lack of aspiration among some teachers for working class kids in "bog standard comprehensives" ever since.

I joined the Conservative Party on my first full day at Bristol University and also the University Officer Training Corps later the same day. An MA in War Studies from Kings College London followed, prior to local Government, a run out against Ken Livingstone in Brent East in 1997 and then election to Parliament for Rayleigh in 2001.

I am proud of where I came from and of having two loving parents, who greatly encouraged me. However, I have always held in contempt those champagne socialists - from wealthy backgrounds but hopelessly wracked by middle class guilt - who earnestly profess their love for working class people but would scarcely dream of inviting any of them to dinner. It is the Conservative Party which really believes in aspiration - and that's why I will always be a member of it.

MARK FRANCOIS is a Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence and the Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford

SAJID JAVID MP

Although I joined the Conservative Party during my time at Exeter University, it was my upbringing and early life that shaped my political consciousness.

Abdul-Ghani Javid (or, as he was known to me, Dad) arrived in the UK in 1961 at 23 years of age. His family lost everything during the partition of India and their move to Pakistan, so my father's motivation was quite simple – he wanted to work in Britain and provide the means for his brothers back in Pakistan to be educated.



Disembarking at Heathrow with a £1 note in his pocket (which his father, touchingly but mistakenly, had said would see him through his first month in the UK), my father made his way up north and found a job in a Rochdale cotton mill.

Happy to be employed, he nevertheless strived for more. He set his sights on working on a bus, only to be turned away time and again.

But he didn't give up. He persisted and was hired as a bus conductor, then a driver, earning the nickname 'Mr Night & Day' from his co-workers. After that came his own market stall, selling ladies clothes (many sewn by my mother at home) and, eventually, his own shop in Bristol.

My four brothers and I, all born in Rochdale, lived with my parents in the two-bedroom flat above our shop on Stapleton Road (which, although home to us, was later dubbed "Britain's most dangerous street").

This – along with our family breaks to visit cousins back in Rochdale and our biannual treat of hiring a VHS player for a weekend to binge on movies – might not fit everyone's definition of success, but success is always relative. My

parents achieved their aims – to help their immediate and extended families and to provide for and educate my brothers and me.

After attending state schools in Bristol, and being advised to start my working life by securing an apprenticeship, I decided to continue my academic education and won a place at Exeter University to study Economics and Politics, the first member of my family to go to university.

This is the root of my conservative beliefs. My mother and father had nothing and, like many people in their adopted country, worked their way up. All they had to rely on was their own drive and determination, a willingness to work hard, and the confidence to take risks in the hope of greater rewards.

There were, of course, ups and downs. But, whenever my parents were knocked down, in business or in anything else, they picked themselves up and started again. The abiding lesson was clear to me: don't doubt yourself and don't stop trying.

I saw my parents' resolve pay off, and their sense of personal responsibility and self-development was instilled in my brothers and me. My parents and, through them, my brothers and I, flourished in the UK's meritocracy in ways that would not have been possible otherwise.

I believe that what worked for my family and me works for everyone else in the UK. Encouraging everyone to be the best that they can be is the surest way to personal and national contentment and prosperity. That is why I am proud to be British and Conservative.

SAJID JAVID is the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Member of Parliament for Bromsgrove.



**PATRICK
McLOUGHLIN
CONSERVATIVE.**

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RT HON PATRICK McLOUGHLIN MP

I remember well the first time I decided I wanted to serve in politics. It was after a trip to the House of Commons with my local MP Patrick Cormack. When, on my return to Cannock, I told a friend of my plans, he replied, ‘well, I’d keep that secret if I were you’.

No doubt if I had told him which party I planned to represent, the response might have been even more negative. Yet whilst people are always surprised that an ex-miner is now a Conservative member of the Cabinet, the truth is the people I worked with at Littleton Colliery in the West Midlands were far more right wing than I was, whether you were talking about immigration, tax or law and order. They just voted for Labour because they always had done.

But I didn’t. I’d seen how a Labour government had let people down in the second half of the 1970s. And I understood that The Conservative Party was a party for all types of people, brought together not by background or wealth but by a shared understanding of the power of freedom, the potential of people and the great things that can be achieved through effort, enterprise and ambition. In short, ours is a party that helps people, rather than holding them down.

I didn’t follow my friend’s advice and keep my views to myself either. I worked as a miner while serving as a Conservative on Cannock Chase District Council. I was proud to be a Conservative because I saw the way in which our party, under Margaret Thatcher, was helping people who wanted to help themselves and achieve a better life for themselves and those around them.

That pride is still there when I look today at what the current government, led by David Cameron, has achieved. That is true whether we are talking about enabling teachers to deliver higher standards and better discipline in our schools, reforming our welfare system so that it pays to work, increasing the amount people can earn before paying tax or – our central task – reducing the deficit and tackling the complete mess left behind by the last lot.

Those are all vital tasks that will help people across the country growing up in similar circumstances to those I knew as a young man. The Conservatives were the ones sticking up for me back then. And we are the ones sticking up for hardworking people across the country now.

PATRICK MCLOUGHLIN is Secretary of State for Transport and the Member of Parliament for Derbyshire Dales.

SHERYLL MURRAY MP

I was born and raised in Millbrook, a village in Cornwall. I was the youngest of three children and we lived in a Council House. My father met my mother when he moved down the River Tamar to the village where he worked for his Aunt and Uncle skipping one of their pleasure boats. My mother was of the generation that gave up work to raise her children and my father was the sole breadwinner in the family.

Despite limited income, my parents always tried to do their best for us. I always remember my mother and father giving up things like new clothes for themselves to make sure that we had the Christmas present that we had asked for. Even these presents bore no resemblance to the presents children expect today, all I ever expected from my parents was a single present.

Summer holidays were spent at the local beach of Tregonhawke in Whitsand Bay, my parents could not afford to take us away to exotic places abroad and yet I only remember very happy times, spent with loving and caring parents.

As a teenager, I was much luckier than many of my friends. Whilst my parents could not afford to buy me what would be termed today as “designer” clothes, my sister who was much older than me was a trained seamstress and would often spend hours making me clothes so I kept up with the latest fashions.

I was quite academic and on leaving school I trained with an insurance company as an underwriter. Once I started work I remember the work ethic that my father had instilled into me. This has remained with me throughout my life and I know that you never achieve anything unless you work hard for it.

Like my brother and sister, I strove to buy a home of my own and worked



hard to achieve this. I met and married a local fisherman and put a lot of effort into our business. Fishing is a business where you can earn a lot of money in one month and then go for weeks during the winter months with your boat tied alongside the quay because of bad weather. We had some very lean times but still tried to make sure that our children did not go without.

I worked part time at the local GP Surgery when my children were growing up and also volunteered for the local Fishermen's Association as their Secretary. This is where my interest in politics started. The fishermen clearly felt I was doing good work because they elected me as Chairman of the local Fish Producer's Organisation which was responsible for allocating £28 million of fish quota. I represented the Industry at EU meetings and also in meetings with various Ministers. I decided to stand for the Local County and District Councils and was delighted when my home area voted for me to represent them.

When I decided to stand for Parliament, I gave up my fishing work because I knew that I would not have the time to do everything. It was a complete surprise when I was elected to be the MP for South East Cornwall.

I am proud to represent my home area in Westminster as the Member of Parliament. Having been raised in a loving home by parents who strived to give us so much with very limited income is reflective of many of my constituents. I have the firm foundations to ensure the majority of people of South East Cornwall are represented in Westminster by someone who understands their lives as well as caring about their interests.

SHERYLL MURRAY is the Member of Parliament for South East Cornwall

DAVID NUTTALL MP

At the time I was growing up in Swallownest, a small village between Rotherham and Sheffield in South Yorkshire, I never really considered myself as living in a working class or blue collar neighbourhood.

All I knew was the love of my family who instilled in me the values and instincts that I still have today. Swallownest was undoubtedly a working class area full of miners and steelworkers. My father worked in a rolling mill in one of the many Sheffield steelworks. It was hot, dangerous work. I recall the horror stories of men killed by red hot bars shooting out of the mill that they failed to catch and went through them.



From an early age I was told if I wanted to avoid working in a mill or going down the pit I had to work hard at school and pass my exams. So I did. I worked hard. I went to Sunday School and was taught about the Bible and I make no apology for saying I believe in God.

I was taught that if at first I failed I should persevere. So I did. When I failed to get the grades to go to University at 18 I joined a local firm of Solicitors as a Trainee Legal Executive and after ten years of studying in the evenings and at weekends I was a fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives, had a Law degree as an external from London University passed my Solicitors Finals and became a Solicitor.

It is not surprising therefore that today I am a Conservative. I believe in self-reliance. That one should do all they can to look after themselves and their families. I believe in individual responsibility and the free market. I grew up surrounded by those who believed in socialism. It was patently obvious to me socialism led to reliance on the state the crushing of the individual's free spirit.

I had to deploy the same level of determination and perseverance to get to the House of Commons only being elected at the fourth attempt. I want others to have the same chances as I had and as I look at the opportunities available to young people today there is no reason at all for anyone not to be able to make a success of their life. There are endless courses and schemes available from central government, local government charities and the private sector.

All too often nowadays people expect success and a good life to be handed them on a plate.

The problem is not poverty among the working class it is poverty of aspiration.

DAVID NUTTALL is Member of Parliament for Bury North.

RT HON MIKE PENNING MP

I'm very proud of my working class roots. From a very young age I've always wanted to get on in life; I've always had a dream to strive for.

At school it wasn't about being top of the class, or going on to university. I actually found school very hard and just felt I didn't fit in. I learnt, later in life that was partly due to my dyslexia - something I knew nothing about until I was in the Army.

As a young lad at school I must have been seen as disruptive at best. But the Army took me, perhaps because like many who are dyslexic, I was quite good at sport.

The Army let me live my dream and encouraged everyone's dreams and aspirations. Sadly I wasn't a very good Guardsman and never got beyond the rank of Acting Lance Corporal, (today I'm the Honorary Colonel of 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment, Army Cadet Force!) It's true that at times I felt the Army wasn't for me but I compensated for this by always taking any opportunities as they came along, driving courses, parachuting and anything that helped me get on.

Later I left and joined the Fire Service in Essex which is still, to this day, one of the most invigorating and exiting professions I've ever had (especially on call, driving a fire appliance on a blue light takes some beating.) But, even then I harboured a passion to be my own boss to use more of the brain than the brawn, so on leaving the service I taught myself business skills and went to evening classes to learn about journalism.

I am indebted to my incredibly supportive wife Angie. She married me as a Fireman and to this day must regret telling me, after one of my numerous moaning sessions about politicians, "to shut up or do something about it." Along with a lot of luck...this is what has got me to where I am today.



I still have dreams and ambitions about what I want to do in life, but today they are more about helping others to ensure they have the same chances that I have had. These opportunities are only there because of what my Grandparents fought for and a party that gives everyone a chance.

That's why I'm a Conservative.

MIKE PENNING is Minister of State for Work and Pensions and is the Member of Parliament for Hemel Hempstead.

ANDREW ROSINDELL MP

I was not brought up in a political family and therefore, when I decided join the Conservative Party at the age of fourteen, I had little idea that I would end up representing my home town of Romford in the House of Commons some twenty one years later. I had grown up in a period when the day-to-day lives of my family and my neighbours had fallen hostage to an aggressive regime of powerful left-wing unions and socialist dogma, with strikes, disruption and violence subjecting our country to darkness and decline. It felt as if the state were controlling every aspect of our lives and we were without economic freedom.



In 1979, the country that I loved so much had come to breaking point. So naturally I searched for the party that wanted to put Britain back on the right track and I found this in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party.

To me the Conservatives, then under the leadership of the late, great Maggie, represented the true workers' party; a party which valued the individual irrespective of class or socio-economic status. The Conservatives believed - and continue to believe - that hard work should pay and that the state should never act as a barrier to individual self-fulfilment. It was clear to me that the Conservatives understood that big government and high taxation harm the labourers laying the foundations of our nations' tallest buildings, as well as to those who own them and it was the Conservative Party that was dedicated to preserving all that is wonderful about our great nation. We are fortunate to hail from an island nation with a rich history and are - dare I say it - the envy of much of the world.

The Conservatives welcome patriots from across the land to join us in the fight against those who would see our country smothered in political correctness

and shackled by the European Union. In my own constituency of Romford, you find the British bull dog spirit in each of our towns' people. We care about our national identity and are determined to preserve our nation's heritage and culture. Be it flying the British flag proudly, singing 'God Save the Queen' or eating roast beef on a Sunday, patriotism and love of country is what unites us as a people and social cohesion depends upon it.

The Conservative Party is the party of Queen, Commonwealth and Nation and in today's confused political times, we must strike out as the party that is truly dedicated to releasing the British Lion from its chains, so that it may once more roar for all the world to hear!

ANDREW ROSINDELL is Member of Parliament for Romford.

ALEC SHEL BROOKE MP

When I'm asked why I - a comprehensive school educated, son of two teachers, former kitchen and bathroom fitter - became a Conservative MP I usually quip: "I was too poor to be a socialist".

But in truth it was more than my pretty ordinary upbringing that made me a Conservative, there was something in the ethos of the Tory party that chimed with me and made me want to be an MP from a relatively young age.

I never particularly enjoyed school, I found it quite boring and I was often itching to get out into the workplace. Yet, it was at school that I first recognised quite how Conservative policies were delivering for communities like mine. When the Tories introduced grant maintained state schools, of which mine was one, it really proved to me that Ronald Reagan's mantra of small government delivering freedom to achieve the best outcomes, worked.

My state school was literally falling apart before this policy came in and yet when we returned to school for the autumn term after it achieve grant maintained status, you could see physical fabric improvement and pride in the school once again.

From then to now, for me the Conservative Party is about helping people to achieve their own dreams, not telling them what they can achieve as has been the philosophy of past and current Labour frontbenches.

Looking back at my school days, seeing people I went to school with, who never bothered doing their homework or paying any attention, fail their exams and spend years living off the state, has shaped me enormously as an individual. Whilst I used to be up at 5am in the morning to do the papers in WH Smith's before college,



then whilst doing my degree getting up at 4am to sweep a factory floor, the idea of working hard to achieve your own goals has been one I've always understood.

This work ethic, instilled in me from my parents, alongside a school full of militant teachers moaning at me every two minutes, told me that life rewards those who work hard and those who do work hard can achieve anything. On reflection, I realise now that this was what the Conservative conviction of Thatcher and Reagan was all about; governments empowering people. In his 1981 inaugural address, Reagan said "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is our problem", it was this sense of realism that inspired me to become actively involved in politics later in life.

My sister and I both went to the same local comprehensive school and then onto University; I qualified as a Mechanical Engineer and she is now an orthopaedic surgeon. There were no silver spoons in our family, just a sense of optimism built on the principles of hard work, self discipline and ambition.

So, when people do ask me why I became a Conservative MP, I can answer with all honesty that it's because my very ordinary upbringing, in a close and supportive family, unknowingly moulded me this way.

Fundamentally, I believe we need politicians from normal backgrounds to go out and stand up for others who often feel too afraid to stand up for themselves. I am a proud trade unionist and for many years I was member of Unite the Union, until I could no longer stay part of a union that - like Scargill before it - used its hard working members for its own political gain within the Labour Party.

Like millions of my generation, I was brought up with no financial advantage or a family lineage typical of many Parliamentarians before me - both Labour and Conservative. Yet, I don't feel disadvantaged by this; I had the same opportunities as most other people in Britain. Where I know I did have an advantage is that I joined a political party that is a broad church, welcoming people from all walks of life and promoting policies that back those who work hard and do the right thing to get on in life.

That's why I am a Conservative.

ALEC SHELBRooke is Member of Parliament for Elmet and Rothwell

PAUL UPPALL MP

I am the child of immigrants to the UK and was born in a small, terraced house in Smethwick, which was shared by not only my own family, but my uncle's family too. Under modern classifications, at that time in my life, I would have probably been defined as homeless, as I used to share my bedroom with my sister and some of my cousins. I went from a state primary school and comprehensive school to a technical college in the centre of Birmingham before I went to University, which is not the usual route into the Palace of Westminster and the beginnings of a parliamentary career. I often tell family, friends and colleagues of the importance of education in my life. In the 1970s, when I attended a state primary school in Northfield in South West Birmingham, I was largely ignored and, at first, put into remedial classes by my teachers who wrongly presumed that my competency with the English language was poor. However, one teacher, Mr Breedan, took a great interest in me; he not only encouraged but gave me confidence in my ability. More importantly, he noticed that I was receiving the wrong kind of education in response to my ability.



After University, I ran my own business, and in that time, I was my own accountant, builder and occasional cleaner. I found that experiences like this, as well as being incredibly lonely, manage to keep you very grounded and humble. In hindsight, it is now very clear to me that without the intervention of this one teacher, I am sure that state education would have failed me. I doubt whether I would have gone on to receive a University education, start a career in Business, and now, hold my position as an elected Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West. As an MP, I am now in the privileged position to be

able to affect the education that future pupils receive. I intend to make the most of this position, and leave a positive legacy for future generations, so they can have the same opportunities I enjoyed.

The reason I became interested in politics was because I realised that politics matters. My family came to these shores because they wanted to live in a country that offered them refuge, opportunities and stability. I managed to escape poverty through my own ambition, drive and an element of good fortune. The reason I'm a Conservative is because I want to give that same ladder of social mobility, which Mr Breedan gave me, to any other shy child that may be sitting in a British classroom today. Inevitably, your Politics reflects your personal experience, and unlike many people who have read about poverty, I've actually experienced it and can assure anyone that unlike those who assume this on the left, there is no nobility in poverty. Government can't do it all for you, but it can provide the platform and catalyst for anyone from any background to fulfil their dreams.

PAUL UPPALL is Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West

DAME ANGELA WATKINSON MP

I didn't know I was working class until my arrival at Wanstead County High School in 1953, having passed the 11 plus. It was a culture shock. I was born and brought up in nearby Leytonstone – in private rented accommodation, (council tenants were the lucky ones), outside lavatory, no bathroom or running hot water. I sound like one of Monty Python's 4 Yorkshiremen, but "by, we really did 'ave it tough!". But I didn't know I was poor until I met middle class children for the first time at Wanstead.



They came from a different world where people lived in houses and had cars, telephones and fridges. Their mothers didn't have to work and I was ashamed that mine did. Neither had I ever heard the words poverty, benefit or entitlement. The people I knew were proud, independent and respectable. They knew that if they wanted something, the only way to get it was to work hard, save up and wait until they could afford it. Those principles are dyed in the wool with me and made me a Conservative.

I was exposed to political debate from the cradle although I didn't recognise it as such. My father was old Labour, seething with resentment at anyone who had a better life than him. He assumed that they had either achieved it dishonestly or had it handed to them on a plate. My mother, conversely, had ambition and aspiration to make life better by her own efforts and I instinctively knew she was right. I believe that people are not responsible for their luck, good or bad, but they are responsible for how they play the hand they were dealt. Good manners, honesty, tolerance and personal responsibility are non-negotiable - that also makes me a Conservative, but I also love the wide spectrum of character traits, personalities, talents and skills that make us so different from one another. I

particularly enjoy eccentricity and admire the ability of the human spirit to endure setbacks in life and emerge stronger.

I recall the only career advice I received at Wanstead. The girls were gathered in the hall and told that there were only two respectable occupations for girls – teaching or nursing. “teachers over there – nurses over there!” As I wished to do neither I was a lost cause. This was reinforced by the Head teacher when I left. When I said I had a job in a bank (I was too embarrassed to explain that we could not afford for me to go to university) – there was a pregnant pause followed by “Oh, commerce!” I also recall our English Literature teacher, when a girl said she didn’t understand something, saying that it didn’t matter as she was only a girl and would probably just get married. Neither was it deemed necessary for the girls to attend lessons on current affairs – that was the exclusive domain of the boys. The traditional grammar style education I received at Wanstead was otherwise good, provided you could make rapid notes! Latin, which I hated at the time, has proved invaluable and the attitudes to girls are barely remembered. Respect cannot be demanded or bought – it has to be earned. I learned not to tolerate condescension, pomposity, prejudice or discrimination, and that people treat you the way you allow them to treat you. Those values make me a Conservative.

My route to parliament was long. I took a career break to look after my three children for twelve years. Raising three children to be reasonably happy, well adjusted and productive adults is my most significant achievement. That makes me a Conservative. I spent the next twelve years working in a Special School and I draw on those experiences constantly. There followed a career in local government, during which I completed my higher education. It also enabled me to observe Labour and Conservative administrations in action. The Conservatives always had more respect for the taxpayer, sought best value and high standards in public services. It reinforced my Conservative principles. Later I took early retirement and stood for election, first as a councillor and then as a county councillor. When I applied to be a parliamentary candidate, everyone thought I had left it too late. Undeterred, I progressed smoothly through the approval process and came out the other end without my age, background or gender ever being mentioned. We really are not the Nasty Party. I was lucky enough to be selected at my first attempt and tackled the challenge of getting myself elected in the only way I know – work, work and then work some more. My working class credentials helped me to buck

the trend in the 2001 election which, overall, was very bad for the Conservatives.

The experiences of economising on a very modest budget throughout my early years are invaluable in empathising with other people's problems – that makes me a Conservative.

Most of my parliamentary career has been as a Whip, in opposition and as a lord commissioner in government. The Whips are first in, last out every day, so my working class habits were ideally suited to that role.

The job brings other immense privileges. Just working in the historic Palace of Westminster meeting special people like the Queen and the Royal Family, Pope Benedict, Heads of State and world leaders that would not otherwise have been possible and visited countries I would probably never have seen. A visit of UK women MPs to Iran to promote women's rights, the UN in New York and the first visit by the UK parliament to South Africa stand out in my memory. Becoming a Dame was completely unexpected and all the more precious when I remember my starting point. We Conservatives and our values make great ambassadors for our country, whatever our origins.

DAME ANGELA WATKINSON is Member of Parliament for Hornchurch and Upminster.



Renewal's goal is to help the Conservative Party to broaden its appeal in order to win an overall majority and be able to govern alone for a sustained period of time.

In particular, we consider four overlapping challenges for the Conservative Party, aiming to set out how it can serve and appeal to:

- Working people.
- People living outside of the traditional Conservative heartlands.
- Ethnic minority voters.
- Voters living in cities, major urban centres and their suburbs.

We aim to develop practical solutions to these Conservative challenges, with a particular focus on:

- Building more housing.
- Moving towards full employment.
- Urban renewal and reviving less prosperous parts of the UK.
- Helping the low paid.
- Protecting consumers.
- Creating a cohesive society.

This book of essays, compiled by David Amess MP, with a foreword by Sir John Major, brings together a selection of Conservative MPs from working class backgrounds who talk about why they're Conservatives. It shows why the Conservatives are the party of opportunity and should be the party of choice for ordinary working people.