

JOHN ARTHUR STEVENS DCL

Mr Chancellor,

I come from a generation of Geordies who for many years were denied the simple pleasure of disposing of a used car by selling it on, or voluntarily scrapping it. For us, car ownership always ended at random, at the discretion of the “TWOCers”: those who ‘take without owner’s consent’. By 1990 it seemed like TWOCers were a permanent fixture in the Geordie population: we would never bid farewell to our cars save by identifying charred remains for police officers, or inspecting wreckage sticking out of ram-raided shop windows.

Then a miracle happened: the population of TWOCers went into steep decline. By 1993 they were virtually extinct. As a geologist, sudden extinctions are something I’ve studied. I initially wondered if this was a case of natural selection: so many TWOCers were ending up dead through their recklessness that their share of the gene pool *had* to be declining.

As it turned out, it wasn’t natural selection at all, but another Force of Nature: John Arthur Stevens, who became Chief Constable of Northumbria in September 1991. Nascent ‘no-go’ areas in run-down suburbs were obviated as

Chief Constable Stevens re-deployed hundreds of officers from desk jobs to the front line. He also pioneered the use of CCTV in the City Centre, making the UK's favourite party city safe for all to enjoy. In five busy years he presided over a 42% decrease in crime rates in our region.

This success was born of experience gained the hard way. New to the beat in central London in 1962, PC Stevens soon discovered he had an innate skill for recognising those subtleties of human behaviour which betray guilty secrets. Within a year 'Swifty Stevens' held the record for criminal arrests in his district. Senior officers were no less swift to recognise John's talents and after only 18 months he was assigned to detective work. Twenty-seven commendations for bravery or skilled detective work attest to his prowess. Using only his bare hands or a truncheon, John restrained and arrested criminals wielding knives and even axes. Asked about such incidents, John modestly replies that he wouldn't call his acts courageous: just instinctive reactions in a crisis, in which adrenaline took over. One wonders how many other people's adrenaline wouldn't prompt them to sprint to safety!

John Stevens has never settled for second-best in the ethics of policing. Always sickened by corruption and bigotry within the force, John resolutely combated both as he rose through the ranks. His philosophy is succinctly

summarised in the testimony he gave to the Morris Inquiry in 2004, in his capacity as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police:

“... There is no place in the Metropolitan Police for anyone who believes it is acceptable to discriminate against people on any grounds of gender, sexual orientation, faith or belief, disability or age. If you do not believe in the fundamental right of people to be treated with respect, dignity and compassion ... you should get out of the service now...”

His renowned devotion to such principles led to John being asked to conduct three major inquiries into allegations of collusion between the security forces and paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. This challenge had defeated several eminent predecessors. John and his team spent 14 years pursuing their investigations, meeting lies and obstruction at every turn. In 1990 their inquiry headquarters were burnt out in an obvious inside job. The miscreants were confounded when it emerged that DCC Stevens had been using the latest computer technology to automatically back-up every scrap of evidence on another server in Cambridgeshire. Thus the Stevens Inquiries continued, ultimately leading to more than 100 convictions, and paving the way for one Christopher Patten CH to recommend a ‘New Beginning’ for policing in Northern Ireland in 1999.

When John Stevens was appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in February 2000, the Force was just beginning to assimilate the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Commissioner Stevens led from the front, articulating an honest and constructive response to valid criticisms, and tirelessly raising the aspirations and morale of his colleagues.

Throughout his career John found time for sport, successively excelling in rugby, cricket and squash. You may feel that I have described a superman. It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that John Stevens can indeed fly! Inheriting his passion for aviation from his father, who ran one of the UK's first private airlines from Newcastle Airport, John uses his piloting skills both for recreation and voluntary work. The charity Convoy 2000, which John co-founded, brings relief to orphans, the disabled and AIDS sufferers in Romania. Convoy 2000 is not only served by an accomplished pilot: it also benefits from the nursing expertise of Lady Cynthia Stevens.

After his retirement on 6th April 2005, John was created a life peer as Baron Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, in the uplands of Northumbria. He was appointed Chancellor of Northumbria University on November 28th 2005. In very many ways he has come home to the North East. To celebrate his

retirement, Lord Stevens bought himself a Porsche Carrera: it would be a rash individual indeed who took this without the owner's consent!

Throughout his career, Lord Stevens has championed the very highest standards in policing, courageously combating crime and internal corruption. In recognition of his outstanding achievements, Mr Chancellor, I now ask that you bestow upon him the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Paul Younger