

Contrast these two real-life events if you will ...

**In 1984** our local school, Box Highlands, closed its doors after 42 years. The school was opened in 1942 to cater for the children of mainly immigrant (Irish) workers who came to work in the underground factories at Spring Quarry and Tunnel Quarry. I realised that this was an historic occasion so, armed with my camera and plenty of film, I spent the day outside the school recording the comings and goings, the children in the playgrounds and some teachers, teaching assistants and parents. I did not seek permission nor did anyone, whether teacher, teaching assistant or parent, ask what I was doing.

**In 2012**, following the opening of the Bradford Road gate at the new school (initially with the same name then Corsham Woodland School then Corsham School, Broadwood Site) I decided to take photographs, from a distance of around 100 metres, of the traffic chaos that had ensued (the 5-year, 70-page email chain on the subject may be found at the foot of the following webpage:

<https://www.rudloescene.co.uk/news/rudloe/school-gate-saga/> - this campaign resulted, eventually, in Wiltshire Council installing double-yellow lines along a substantial length of the road). With 44-tonne trucks, tractors pulling industrial farm machinery, motorway maintenance lorries, buses and other general arterial road traffic passing (or, in fact, being held up) two mothers approached me to ask what I was doing.

**In thirty years, we had moved from an age of innocence to one of suspicion and fear.** Not fear of actual, potentially dangerous events such as little Johnny being squashed by a 44-tonne truck but imagined fear of the intentions of a possible miscreant whose actual objective was the security of the children and road users. We should not be living like this.

An article by Quentin Letts in the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Times 2 is apposite. It included ... “*Until recently I belonged to our village’s PCC, or parochial church council ... Belonging to the PCC was a minor chore but someone has to do these things and the clergy could not run the Church without PCC members ... However, we were told we could not continue as members unless we attended a morning-long course on ‘safeguarding’, ie child protection. We would need to attend a workshop run by the diocese safeguarding supremo. We all knew each other but none of us had previously encountered the retired policewoman who was giving the C1 Learning and Development Framework Safeguarding Core Module. And yet she managed to make us feel small. She lectured us for four hours about sex crimes. “I believe no one, I tend to suspect the worst in people” she said. I left that event filled with what I feared were un-Christian feelings. My temper boiled. Damn them and their horrible insistence on thinking the worst. If we suspect everyone else of being a child-molester, how will we ever send our toddlers to nursery? How will we drop them off at a birthday party or let them sit on Father Christmas’s knee at the department store? Pursue that thinking and you will soon wonder if there is any point being a member of the human race. And yet this was being done by my Church.”*

And so we come to the non-event that has been dominating the news for the past week (writing this on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021) – the Meghan and Harry interview with Oprah. Two things came, principally, from the interview: Meghan’s mental health and the question of racism within the British royal family. Let’s concentrate on the latter. Why should a quite innocent question in a private, family conversation about the possible colour of Harry and Meghan’s baby become a question of racism? Why would this conversation have been revealed in the first place? Surely the conversation would have continued to a conclusion perhaps of addressing the question there and then or perhaps

of indicating that this is not the kind of question that one should ask in a politically-correct society. But it is surely not something, unless there was an axe to grind, that should have been the cause of a festering resentment which would only be exposed years later in an interview with a global audience. Now, thanks to the predilection of the media to make a drama of everything, a casual remark has been turned into a question of racism within the royal family. All the usual suspects (Diane Abbott and many others) have emerged from the woodwork to put in their two pennies' worth on the subject.

Why are these critics, like Diane Abbott, taking a position that that there was racism behind the remark? Why not take the position that it was simply an innocent question of curiosity? Could it be that taking the adversarial position reinforces an argument that they have been positing for years?

So we should not ask questions about a person's colour? But wait a minute, on 21<sup>st</sup> March (next Sunday) we are asked to complete our census form which, *inter alia*, contains the following questions, supposedly on 'ethnicity' – the question 'What is your ethnic group?' has the following options:

*White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British*

*Irish*

*Gypsy or Irish Traveller*

*Any other White background*

*Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups*

*White and Black Caribbean*

*White and Black African*

*White and Asian*

*Any other Mixed or Multiple ethnic background*

*Asian or Asian British*

*Indian*

*Pakistani*

*Bangladeshi*

*Chinese*

*Any other Asian background*

*Black, African, Caribbean or Black British*

*African*

*Caribbean*

*Any other Black, African or Caribbean background*

*Other ethnic group*

*Arab*

*Any other ethnic group*

*In Wales, 'Welsh' is the first option in the White category*

That these questions may be asked officially but not privately is clearly a preposterous standpoint. Steve Jones, in '**The Language of the Genes**' says (p190): "*The word 'race' is woolly and ill-defined. As it includes social and political as well as biological criteria, genetics alone can never claim to have solved the problem of human racial differentiation. In an attempt to solve the problem, the term 'ethnic group' is used. For ethnic identity what matters most is the group we think we belong to*". In any case, the questions in the census are ridiculous – 'white' and 'black' are not ethnicities, they are colours – but the questions can be asked (in this country - but not in France where it is against the law – in France, you are simply French whatever your colour/race/ethnicity).

So should the press and others (DA etc) who have vindictively castigated an unknown member of the royal family (but now the whole family has, effectively, suffered this accusation) now take a stand against the census question on ethnicity? More than likely they will not because there is no easy target there, just a faceless government department.

Another side of this coin (or maybe the same side) is **the taking of offence** which has, effectively, become an industry. The taking of offence appears to be undertaken quite deliberately in particular when the offender is white and the supposed offended is non-white. This, generally, in order to play the 'trump card' – racism. This can come about when a quite innocent question 'Where are you from?' (or similar) is asked. When deliberate offence-taking is confined to the bin, this question can and does lead to interesting conversations and increased understanding (and knowledge and laughs) between those involved in the conversation. I have come to know many of our European workers through asking the question: Karolina from Lithuania, Emma from the Czech Republic, Eddie from Slovenia (all at Kingsmead Kitchen), Slavo from Slovakia (at Thoughtful Bread), 'Max' a polyglot from Albania (at Cafe Rouge and elsewhere), Andrea and Sophia from Romania (at the Greenhouse, Wadswick Green) and so on.

Yesterday (15<sup>th</sup> March 2021), the gas man came. He gave us his card 'Liam Kelly' from Caerphilly – from an Irish family no doubt but Liam had clearly grown up in Wales. The Irishness/Welshness was where the conversation started and then continued down other avenues for quite a while. And going back a few years, myself, her majesty and our daughter were staying at a Central London hotel close to St Bart's hospital. All the hotel staff were eastern European. Each day we set off for St Bart's and, as I was usually the first 'down', while waiting for the girls I chatted to the bowler-hatted doormen. Close to the end of our stay, one of the doormen asked "Where are you from, because you speak English very well?". This caused much amusement then and many times since.

The use of the racist card has become the new fascism. People living in fear of being called racist because they use supposedly inappropriate language or ask inappropriate questions; people losing their jobs, their livelihoods through this new form of fascism. But it is so difficult to navigate the waters of politically correct language (as many people have found out to their cost) – note the following government advice on the use of language when writing about ethnicity and people with disabilities (not sure I can say that!):

### **Disabilities**

*Use 'disabled people' not 'the disabled' as the collective term. Don't automatically refer to 'disabled people' in all communications – many people who need disability benefits and services don't identify with this term. Consider using 'people with health conditions or impairments'.*

## **Ethnicity**

*We do not use the terms BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic or BME (Black and minority ethnic). Similarly, we do not use ‘people of colour’ as it does not include White minorities. We avoid using ‘broad’ and ‘specific’ when referring to ethnic groups, for example, the ‘broad Asian group’ or the ‘specific Pakistani group’. If we need to, we refer to either ‘aggregated’ ethnic groups or ethnic groups ‘as a whole’. For example, ‘the Black ethnic group as a whole’, ‘people from a Black Caribbean background’, ‘the Black ethnic group’ and ‘Black people’ are all acceptable phrases, ‘Blacks’ is not. Similarly, ‘people from a White British background’, ‘the White ethnic group’ and ‘White people’ are all acceptable; however, we don’t say ‘Mixed people’ or ‘Mixed race people’. We usually say ‘people with a Mixed ethnic background’ or ‘people from the Mixed ethnic group’.*

Have you got all that – there will be a test at the end ... Oh, this is the end. Talk about treading on eggshells eh, but honestly we should not be living like this.