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Conservatives
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A Hectic Summer

The recess is over for some and the dreadful summer weather fading fast, together with the light evenings. But Dulcie and I have had an absorbing few months, what with her Mayoralty, the Jubilee celebration - of which she was the local chairman - the Olympics, the Paralympics, the Preston Guild and quite a lot of cricket. I hope you enjoyed yourselves as much as we did, despite the weather. We are now taking a few days holiday to recover!

Reshuffle

As I write, the reshuffle is afoot and it is fascinating to watch from the sidelines. Not so much when one's career is on the line though. I was lucky for most of my ministerial career in that the Prime Minister was an old-enough friend to give me good warning of incompetence and imminent demise and he never did. But reshuffles are difficult times. Those who go resent their demotion and those who are ignored resent their failure and both are inclined to foment strife and disorder on the back benches. That's where the new Chief Whip comes in! I am pleased that the vast experience of Ken Clarke is to be retained - he is too able to lose from Government entirely - and delighted with the new Party Chairman. There is no doubt that HMG needs a sharper focus and a renewed sense of purpose and I know that all Party supporters need a bit of a lift.

Sport

The Olympics and Paralympics have been an extraordinary success and there cannot be many people who have not noticed what went on.



When I was Sports Minister, the latter games were still somewhat secondary in public interest and many countries were not participants. How that has changed and how much better do we all view those with disabilities. They are not "brave", they are proper, competitive sports men and women and their achievements are simply astonishing. I think that I enjoyed them more than the Olympics. Another important reminder was given to the rest of the world as well - namely that the spirit of British organisation and sportsmanship is second to none. We can be truly proud of our management of both games. Where are all those doomsayers and media carpers now?

Eurozone

What a contrast with the management of the Eurozone. It seems impossible for the leaders of Eurozone governments to make up their minds to do something and to stick to it for longer than five minutes! Clearly Merkel and Hollande have substantial differences in their respective approaches, Greece is desperate, Spain is fretting and the Finland/Netherlands axis is critical of everyone. And we all suffer as a result. Find a Eurozone backside, Prime Minister, and kick it hard!

Preston Guild

We have just enjoyed a rare event in Preston - the Guild Merchant. This has happened almost every 20 years since the first Charter in 1179 and is the only remaining such event in Britain. The relatively new City of Preston does itself proud, with particular emphasis on the importance of local trade and industry.



Guild Court



Trade Procession



Guild Proclamation

There is plenty of traditional ceremonial, of course, with "Burgesses" (citizens) registering the hereditary commitment and desire to enjoy ancient rights and freedoms - some of the connections dating back hundreds of years. For example, Chris Grayling, MP for Epsom and a Government Minister, turned up to remind Prestonians that his Great-Grandfather was Guild Mayor in 1922. All greatly enjoyable but with a serious objective in the improvement of the fortunes of an ancient Borough.

Canals

We had a long weekend on the canal aboard "RATTY" but the weather was so bad we came home. Not before we noticed, however, the change in ownership from British Waterways to the Canal & River Trust - a new charity set up by Government to manage the inland waterways of Britain. No more subventions or subsidies from the taxpayer and more control by the users of the system. I wish it every success.



A wet weekend!

PCC Elections

We are now in the run up to the elections for Police & Crime Commissioners on November 15th. We have a good slate of candidates in the North West and hopes of success in three of the five. I declare another interest too, in that my daughter, Victoria, is standing in Gloucestershire, with similar hopes of victory. In our region, we must do all that we can to make this a success for the Government and the Party. That needs money and manpower. And let us be quite clear - this is NOT politicisation of the police but a more active involvement by the public in the way that local policing is implemented. That has to be good for democracy.

Paul Atkins