



Dame Sheila McKechnie; An Appreciation

By David Hobbs

THE ARCHER was saddened to hear of the death of Dame Sheila McKechnie, the director of the Consumers' Association, who died of cancer on 2 January 2004, aged 55. She was the most effective and influential consumer campaigner in Britain and helped define the modern consumer movement, empowering people to both recognise and assert their rights. As a result of her work, government and businesses now seek the views of consumers, rather than ignoring them as so often in the past.

Born and brought up in Falkirk, Scotland, she studied politics and history at Edinburgh University before going on to take an MA in industrial relations at Warwick University. After a brief period of research work at Oxford University she spent thirteen years working in the trade union movement, culminating in nine years as health and safety officer for ASTMS between 1976 and 1985. During these years she developed many of the skills that were to serve her well in her next role as director of the housing charity, Shelter.

At Shelter she raised the

organisation's profile, vastly increased its campaigning and increased its turnover tenfold. To those who felt that she should not have placed such an emphasis on campaigning she replied that Shelter was more likely to be effective 'campaigning for the homeless than providing a home for the campaignless'.

Consumers' Association

In 1995 she joined the Consumers' Association as director and promptly became the best champion consumers had ever had. She fought successfully for change in such things as the labelling of foodstuffs, the competition laws, advertising to children and car price

fixing. She played a major role in the establishment of The Food Standards Agency and helped improve the control and scrutiny of the financial services industry. She was awarded the OBE in 1995 for her work with the homeless and made a Dame in 2001 for her consumer work.

East Finchley

Sheila moved with her partner, Alan Grant, to East Finchley in 1997 and was, by all accounts, an avid reader of *THE ARCHER*.

THE ARCHER sends its condolences to Alan and all Sheila's family and friends. Sadly, there seems to be no one able to take her place as the consumers' champion.



Sheila McKechnie Photo by John Sturrock.

KALASHNIKOV KULTUR

By Ricky Savage, the voice of social irresponsibility

Transport of delight

It's a cold, wet miserable Monday, my car's decided to die on me and I've got no choice, I've got to get a bus. This is something that offends the petrol head in me because I loathe buses in the way that only a motorised lunatic can loathe them. I mean, apart from those rare times when even I am forced onto them, what use do they serve?

The average bus is badly driven, pollutes the atmosphere and is always late. The timetables aren't about telling when the next bus is due, they're a form of post-modern irony. 'Every five to ten minutes' does not mean that a bus will come along every five to ten minutes, it means that you'll look at your watch and curse the things every five to ten minutes. Naturally, when one turns up it is full, usually of violent school kids in training for suburban warfare or people using shopping trolleys as weapons. In summer the heating is on full blast, in winter they're cold enough to turn yoghurt into a frozen dessert.

The other bit of post modernism is the way that buses always travel in packs for protection. Poor thing, too scared to go out without at least two of its friends for protection. Naturally, one bus is full, one almost empty and the third is playing *No Passengers Please*, where drivers try to get the whole length of the route without picking up a single passenger to win a prize.

Lord Livingstone of Newts is big on buses; he gives them bus lanes. These are almost always empty and all they are used for is speeding taxis, maniacs driving coaches and people who think that the law does not apply to them. My own bus journey took five times as long as by car and was more traumatic than cycling in the fast lane of the M25. It made me realise that paying £5 to drive into London was a bargain compared with sitting on a big six wheeler, diesel engine, 54 seater omnibus. If we can't have buses that work, are comfortable and on time, why have the polluting menaces at all? Ah well, my car's due back on Monday...

A Bible, a Pilgrimage and a Holy War

By Sam Grove

Back in August Sam Grove interviewed three graduates embarking upon their new careers. Five months later Sam has caught up with them to find out how far they have come.

After a stuttering start all three have found steady employment. David works in the city stuffing envelopes, Julian is a door-to-door salesman and Helen works in a renowned out-of-town furniture store. Considering the emphasis all three placed upon 'living the dream' one may question their dedication. However they all continue to harbour thoughts of bigger and better things and see their current terms of employment as merely temporary stopgaps. What David really wants to do is travel. "Sam, there's more to life than London and cheap holidays that can be summed up on one side of

a postcard. I want to experience at first hand new landscapes and cultures, broaden my horizons". Soon he will when he jets off with his uncle to Vietnam for a golfing holiday.

Julian's heart is set on more socially conscious paths of employment. "There are only so many encyclopaedias you can sell to single mums before you start questioning yourself" he told me on one of the more sombre moments of our conversation. Julian knows he wants to write a book that will "make a difference" but he doesn't know what it will be about yet.

Helen is far more likely to be pushed out of her job than

to jump. If one wants to come face to face with pure evil it can apparently be found off the A106 in the Borehamwood Retail Park. After a bit of coaxing she began to elaborate. "There is this one guy that has never liked me. He doesn't like what I stand for and because of that I honestly think he's trying to destroy me."

They, along with many of their peers, are finding it tough going at the moment but while you still have hope...

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