

**University of Aberdeen
Conservative & Unionist Association**

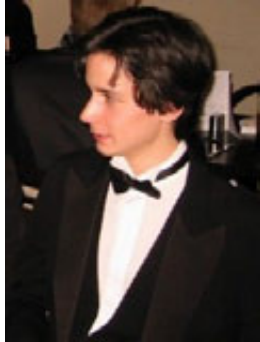


Blue Granite

June 2007

From the President

This is the first Blue Granite published since my election as President in May. I am extremely humbled to lead the party at the University of Aberdeen, a University with which I have strong family connections. I intend to work to the best of my abilities and repay the trust you have shown in me. I look forward to working with the new Committee in the year ahead. One must however, pay tribute to my predecessor Tobias Lehmann for all his hard work in regenerating this Association.



Leslie Clark

It's been an exciting year so far. The Party has had its annual conference in Perth and UACUA members have been elected to the most prominent positions in Conservative Future Scotland. But of course, who could forget the recent Scottish Parliamentary and Local elections with the rise of the Spoilt Ballot Party? The sheer number of spoilt ballots was an affront to our democracy and it surely must come close to eclipsing the Florida 'hanging chads' fiasco in the US Presidential election seven years ago.

Even so, a wind of change has swept through Scottish politics. The Labour Party no longer has a monopoly in Scotland and we now have a new minority SNP government. The march of the Nats was felt nowhere more than here in the North East with Alex Salmond winning in Gordon and the SNP coming from fourth to second in Aberdeen South, almost grabbing the seat from under the nose of Lib Dem leader Nichol Stephen. The North East and the Scottish Parliament as a whole was unfortunate to lose our Honorary President David Davidson as a regional MSP. I would like to thank David for all his support of the Association and wish him all the very best for the future.

Outside the South of Scotland and Edinburgh, the party appeared to make little progress. It was a bit of a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained. The results in the North East should stimulate debate as to how we reform the party and make

it more appealing to the North East – I look forward to contributing to that debate. Nevertheless, due to the nature of minority government, Scottish Conservatives can look forward to exerting more influence on policy than ever before; minority government will require cooperation not confrontation between parties.

I hope you enjoy reading the Blue Granite. I welcome contributions on all matter of policy and from all wings of the party – the Conservatives are after all, a very broad church. The Blue Granite should stimulate debate inside and outside of the Association. I look forward to reading your contributions in the near future.

Have a good summer as you go back to your constituencies and prepare for Gordon Brown!

Best Wishes

Leslie K Clark
President, UACUA

From the Editor

Due to a slight technical 'hitch' which involved me losing the whole thing this edition has been slightly delayed, but better late than never! I hope however that you enjoy reading it, and any comments or suggestions are warmly welcomed for the next issue.



Michael Phillips

As well as articles and commentary on the recent elections by our President and Honorary President, Bill Berry MBE adds a tribute to John Porter, leader of Aberdeen City Council's Conservative Group who sadly passed away on 22 May 2007 aged 75. Finally, reports of our major activities during the year follow. Enjoy your read!

Michael Phillips
Editor, Blue Granite

Cllr John Porter JP

Many tributes have been paid to the late Conservative Group Leader on Aberdeen City Council, John Porter, right across the political arena. John leaves a powerful impression – a man with no frills, no airs or graces but straightforward, honest and upright in all senses, who worked hard and tirelessly for the people of Aberdeen.

John Porter, you lived your life as an honourable man, loved by your family, respected by your friends. We shall remember you with great love and affection.

Bill Berry MBE
Chairman
South Aberdeen Conservative Association

Education, Education, Education: Integral to Enhancing Social Mobility

Leslie Clark, President

It appears as if the Cameron bubble has well and truly burst. The announcement that a Conservative government would not build more grammar schools has led a Shadow Cabinet member to quit and left grassroots Tories frothing at the mouth with rage. Many Tories feel that Cameron has gone too far in his modernising zeal, purging all that they hold dear. Even as a fully fledged 'Cameroonian', I do admit having a soft spot for grammar schools. Grammar schools enabled those from less privileged backgrounds to succeed and their destruction has clearly led to a decline in social mobility. The comprehensive system, a noble egalitarian idea on paper, has actually entrenched class divisions and privilege. The moneyed middle classes can afford to send their little darlings private or indeed move house into an area with a suitable comprehensive. What happens to those left behind? They are failed by the state.

The Conservative Party is the party of aspiration or it is nothing. But how can we roll forward the frontiers of society in the 21st century, rather than harking back to debates long since resolved in the eyes of the British people? Remember, fellow Tories, that we are not representative of the wider population. You can shout from the rooftops regarding grammar schools, Europe or immigration, but it doesn't win you elections.

Something with which we all agree is that Labour have not lived up to their 'Education, Education, Education' mantra. Despite the colossal amounts of taxpayers' money pouring into education, the number of children leaving school without adequate GSCE/Standard Grade qualifications is truly shocking. The inclusion policy has manifestly failed and abolishing the Assisted Places Scheme was a grave error. The only education policies of merit have come at the fag-end of the Blair era and required Tory support to get them through the Commons. City Academies are after all, a re-hash of an old Conservative idea.

In short, the current approach espoused by Cameron and his Education spokesman David Willets, is to build on Blairite

reforms by opening more City Academies, setting them free and to entrust local people to shape their institutions according to local need. This lays the foundations of a sound educational policy. However, we should reject Willets proposal for introducing racial quotas in multi-ethnic areas. Willets should learn lessons from the failed school 'bussing' experiments in the US - enforced desegregation tends to create more bitterness than it assuages. Why should reject academic selection in one speech then impose selection according to ethnicity in another?

The focus should shift from the rather moribund debate regarding grammar schools to one of choice. The notion of choice runs parallel with Cameron's political philosophy: "There is such a thing as society, it just isn't the same as the state". School choice has been used in countries diverse as Chile and Canada. It was first championed by Milton Freidman, whereby a voucher was provided by government for parents to spend with an education provider of their choice, within limits set by the government. There is a growing body of evidence from countries like Sweden that they work.

The dreaded 11+ wasn't even re-introduced at the height of Thatcherism. It's surely time to move on from debating the merits of grammar schools to discussing fresh new policies. The only beneficiary of our wrangling is a certain dour Scotsman who is now our Prime Minister. Enhancing social mobility should be our number one target and it is through education where solutions to this lie. Of course, the problem of poverty is multifaceted but improving the educational standards of those less fortunate would be a start.

A report on the Scottish Parliamentary and Local Council Elections 2007

David Davidson, Honorary President



The 2007 election campaign in Aberdeen South was the most enjoyable of the many I have been involved in, despite the result! The weather was excellent, the likely outcome unpredictable, the electorate were friendly and not a little uncertain as to how they would vote, the main issues seemed to vary day by day and for once since 1997 people were listening to what the Conservatives had to say. Everyone

held Annabel Goldie in high regard and often admitted that our practical approach to deliverable policies on a costed basis struck a chord with them. The only fly in the ointment seemed to be the creation, by the media, of a presidential campaign between Labour and the SNP. Most people on the doorsteps did not want a breakup of the Union and although no-one stated that Scotland could not be independent people agreed that it would set the country back years.

Here in the North East the eventual SNP tidal wave sneaked up on everyone. Even they did not predict the outcome with paper candidates being elected at both Holyrood and Council level. Many voted SNP for the first time even though they were affiliated to or had supported another party for many years. Strategic voting was rampant with Tories voting SNP to get rid of the LibDems who had kept Labour in power and also Labour voters punishing Blair for the Iraq war, pensioner poverty, high taxation at national and local level and even Trident. The smaller parties were no longer perceived relevant so goodbye to Tommy and the Trots, the Greens and single issue independents. The Conservatives and LibDems were not seen as being able to damage Labour as much as the SNP, in other words the new protest vote is for the SNP. Hardly a long term prospect for the Alex Salmond party!

In Aberdeen South we narrowed the gap on Labour to around sixty votes, our best against them since they recovered the seat won by Raymond Robertson from them in 1992. This surely bodes well for the Cameron Conservatives against Brown's Labour at the coming General Election. The spread of votes across the four main parties narrowed spectacularly with the LibDem majority slashed. Aberdeen South is becoming once again a marginal seat.

The Conservatives were proved correct in that we now have a minority government where every issue is voted on line by line and we now have a chance to influence what is delivered for Scotland. This is what we stated we would do rather than go into a coalition where principles are prostituted for power, or at least access to a ministerial car!

I was blessed with tremendous support from young Conservatives from Aberdeen University Conservative Students Association and Conservative Future. Not sure if that was down to my charismatic honorary presidency of the last seven years or simply that the next generation of Tory activists has had enough of the Left and is now out of the political closet fighting for a real change for the good of all. We had many laughs over the campaign either at my hilarious attempts to put things through letterboxes with my right arm in a plaster, the interesting experience for the bon viveurs of supermarket catering and the stunts by some students to gain election to the Council!

My main regrets over the campaign were that there were not enough public hustings, which I love, and the fact that Nicol Stephen, the erstwhile leader of the LibDems in Scotland, failed to attend any public meetings merely sending substitutes. I suppose they will never change the habit of a lifetime and actually answer questions directly about what they really stand for or what they will trade for little in return. What I am certain of, however, is that Scottish politics is at its most interesting stage and that all of the parties will be under scrutiny issue by issue on the actions they take in Holyrood and the resulting effect on the people.

There will be little legislation as nothing can be forced through especially as the government will not have a majority in the chamber or in committee. This is a test for Alex Salmond of how long he can keep his frustration under wraps and for the other leaders to resist petty politicking.

The future for me will include maintaining a watching brief on the political scene through an involvement in the public affairs sector, continue my links with Conservative students and young people, become more active in the voluntary sector which I have long supported and perhaps some committee work in the business and professional sectors. First of all it is to have a holiday, rebuild my campaign tan and learn to write with a pen again as my arm heals. For the Party I see a reorganisation in structure so that it becomes a better campaigning force with a greater involvement for the younger members, a return to power at Westminster and ever greater influence at Holyrood and in local government.

I have had eight wonderful years at Holyrood representing the people of the North East and feel deeply honoured that so many came to me with their problems. I saw the parliament develop and was privileged to speak on behalf of the Party on so many issues and to meet with hundreds of organisations over that time. With my long time in business prior to politics it is sad that there are now so few with business experience there at a time when our economy must develop. Without wealth creation and the opportunities that brings Scotland will be a poorer place. I joined the Conservative party as it was the party of hope and opportunity and that is where our younger members must keep it.

Annual Christmas Dinner

The UACUA Annual Christmas Dinner was held as usual at Howies Restaurant in Aberdeen, in early December. Around 50 people attended, with friends, MSPs and party officials joining us from as far afield as St Andrews, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Murdo Fraser MSP was the guest of honour, and he gave an interesting after dinner speech which was well received.

Toby Lehmann presented with a plaque commemorating the Nelson Mandela TV Lounge at Aberdeen University. Apparently this had been 'appropriated' almost 20 years ago by Mr Fraser, who now felt it fitting to pass it on to the current President of the Association. This was followed by a draw where prizes such as a bottle of Scottish Parliament whisky, chocolates and various items were raffled off. Finally, we all trooped off to a local nightclub where much hilarity ensued; at closing time we decamped to the President's flat where lusty singing carried on into the early hours of the morning...a wonderful evening and everybody felt this eagerly anticipated event was a great success.



Leslie Clark, David Davidson and Cllr George Carr



Michael Phillips proposing the Loyal Toast



Nanette Milne MSP and others



Nanette Milne MSP, Victoria Torrens and Cllr Alan Milne



Dominic Trynka-Watson and Toby Lehmann announce the raffle prizes

Election Night Blue Party

Members and friends gathered at the President's flat for an election night party with a twist. For every Tory seat won, attendees would be required to take a blue drink. The dress code was entirely blue, and a certain President of the Association was spotted sporting a rather fetching 'blue rinse'. Despite the promise of a painfully sober party, at least in its early stages, a great deal of fun

ensued. We were glued to the television as results came in from across Scotland and there were some very exciting moments not least when the Gordon result was announced. Some members were also attending at the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, where local council candidates awaited their results.

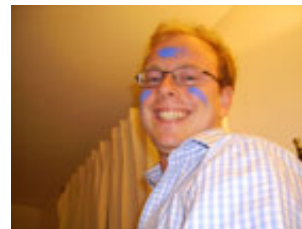


Chris Flint

Leslie Clark



Toby Lehmann



Michael Phillips

Scottish Party Conference, Perth

Several members travelled down to Perth for the Scottish Conservative Party Conference. We had all been looking forward to it and our expectations paid off. Arriving on the Friday night we checked into the Salutation Hotel and then made our way to the Royal George's Bar where most of the delegates were hanging out: a party was in full swing, and we met various people like Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP.



Frank Webster with Cllr Alan Donnelly

Bright and early the next morning we all headed down to the Conference Hall for the Opening Ceremony. The Concert Hall was effectively our base for the next few days, and the great thing was that you could move in and out of the main events and look at the side stalls, talk to people in the foyer and do pretty much as you chose. The Conference was a great opportunity to network; to develop existing relationships; and to make new friendships.



Frank Webster, David Davidson and Toby Lehmann

On both Saturday and Sunday there were several wine reception style lunches and it was possible to go to pretty much whatever interested you. One important and interesting lunch attended by Theresa May MP, David Cameron MP and Francis Maude MP was the 'Women to Win' event, and several members enjoyed this. There were so many things to see and do and learn.



Annabel Goldie MSP, Toby Lehmann, Ross Thomson and Alan Martin discussing tactics

On Saturday evening some of us attended the main dinner, while others took part in the Conservative Future Scotland Casino Night, attended by Annabel Goldie MSP. Afterwards, everyone descended on the bar, and the partying lasted long into the night.

Sunday morning saw a number of bleary-eyed members attend the Closing Ceremony, a lunchtime talk and then a quick drink followed by the journey back up the road to Aberdeen. It was unanimously agreed that we had all really enjoyed ourselves and are very much looking forward to next year's Conference!



Toby Lehmann tries his luck



Toby Lehmann contemplates his losses

Annabel Goldie MSP's Campaign Launch

A few members took the opportunity to travel down for the launch of Annabel Goldie's campaign in West Renfrewshire and to tie this in with a Conservative Future Scotland event. The day was great fun and a great success.



Toby Lehmann, Annabel Goldie MSP, Hannah Dolan, Alan Martin and Leslie Clark from Aberdeen

St Andrews University 140th

Michael Phillips represented Aberdeen at the 140th Anniversary Dinner of the University of St Andrews Conservative and Unionist Association, strengthening links between the two organisations. After the speech by guest of honour Madsen Pirie (Founder of the Adam Smith Institute and St Andrews graduate) he was honoured to offer the Loyal Toast. Afterwards, the obligatory Pier Walk was followed by drinks in the Cellar Bar.



Joseph Musgrave, Michael Phillips and Madsen Pirie after the Loyal Toast



Michael Phillips, Madsen Pirie and Norma Murray

Wednesday Pub Nights

Members always look forward to our weekly meetings. This year we have met at the Aberdeen University Union, and after official Association business is over some great discussions have been had, firm friendships made and great times had. They provide a chance for people to catch up as well as get new members involved. Sometimes we have gone on into town afterwards and continued these discussions in less peaceful surroundings such as Liquid or Tiger Tiger.

From now on, weekly meetings will be held on Wednesdays, at 7pm as usual but with the new venue of Old Blackfriars (they serve real ales there!) If you'd like to join us, simply come along or get in touch with Leslie Clark.

Campaigning

Perhaps the most important area of our activities this year has centred around campaigning. Members have been actively involved in the recent election campaigns – Mary Scanlon in Moray, Nanette Milne in Gordon, David Davidson in Aberdeen South, and Aberdeen City Council elections to name but a few. Former Secretary Hannah Dolan stood in the Old Aberdeen, Tillydrone and Seaton ward, while Frank Webster contested the Midstocket and Rosemount ward as Council Candidates. Ross Thomson stood as a Parliamentary Candidate in Coatbridge and Chryston.

Members have gone out most Saturdays leafleting, canvassing and generally raising awareness of the Scottish Conservatives in the Northeast of Scotland. It is always a good day out – if only for the chance to get out of Aberdeen and into the lovely countryside! We usually break for a pub lunch, too. There will always be opportunities to help, especially now as we work towards the UK Parliamentary elections: if you are interested, please get in touch as we always need bodies!

Annual Summer Barbecue

Members gathered in Toby Lehmann's garden to enjoy our annual summer barbecue. It was also a good chance for everyone to catch up before the holidays. This year we had wonderful weather compared with last year's "light Aberdeen drizzle", which meant that we could stay outside for longer.

Pimm's was again the drink of choice for most and it complemented the fine fare prepared and cooked by Toby Lehmann and Hannah Dolan.



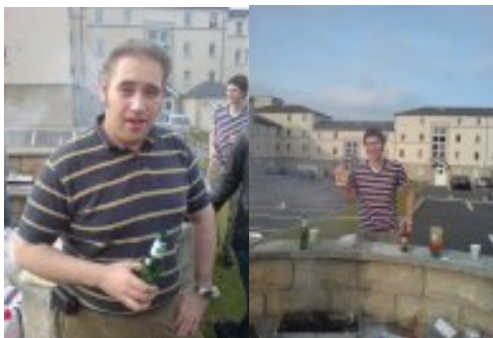
Leslie Clark and Toby Lehmann

At the end of the evening a handover ceremony took place to mark Toby Lehmann's retirement as President after nearly three years, and Leslie Clark's beginning.

Special mention must go to Hannah Dolan, who had baked a lovely cake for the occasion. Everyone asked for seconds!



Graham Cottingham Wood



Alan Martin

James Roy

October – UK Party Conference
December – Annual Christmas Dinner

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Next edition

Our next edition will come out in October 2007, and we welcome contributions, comment and articles especially from new members – submit to the Editor at mej4001@yahoo.com.

The Last Word

Goes to Omar Khyyam, Astronomer-Poet of Persia

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of This and That endeavour and dispute;
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit.

Rubaiyat, Stanza LIV

Major Upcoming Events in 2007

September – Freshers' Fair
September – Freshers' Week Pub Crawl
September – Northeast Party Conference
October – Port and Policy Evening