

## GOT A STORY?

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### How did your political career start? Did you always want to be an MP?

I was born in Whitchurch. During the election before last, I put on my website that I had never lived more than 15 miles from where I was born, and someone put 'Sad man, should get out more...'

I was a tanner for 20, 25 years – we had a family leather business and tanneries, and I took the business from 15 per cent export to 95 per cent export. I left Cambridge University in 1978 – I studied history – and worked there through the late 70s, the 80s and early 90s.

I went to the National Leathersellers College and learned a little about tanning. But am I a tanner? Well, I was mainly involved in sales and running the business.

That took me all over the world. The industry had gone over a cliff in Europe and we had to find new markets and go rapidly upmarket.

That was extraordinarily interesting.

### What did the business actually do?

We were turning raw hide into leather, which was then chopped up for other products.

So, for example, Rolls-Royce needs leather for its cars – the seats and interior. Is that the kind of customer you would supply leather to?

Well, actually, we did indirectly supply Rolls-Royce for a long time. We supplied half-processed leather to other people who would finish off the leather for Rolls-Royce and Jaguar and people like that. We ended up dealing with the best of the best – people like Vuitton, Hermès, those sort of guys.

### So how did that tie in with politics?

My work took me all over the world – I was abroad for about one-third of every year. We were trading in just about every country where free trade was allowed. I ended up as president of the European Tanners' Confederation. To show how much the world has changed, I took Japan, Hungary, Egypt and Argentina to the World Trade Organisation for breach of free trade. Argentina banned the export of their raw material... I was told later to never visit Argentina. Sadly, I haven't done...

But politically, I was seeing countries with fewer politicians and fewer bureaucrats and less regulation and less taxation doing better than ones which had more.

The Soviet Union at that time was a real threat to us – it's hard to imagine these days but there were articles in *The Times* every day about prisoners of conscience, being banged up in places like Prague and Bratislava and Warsaw and Budapest. It's unimaginable these days; they're now tourist destinations but at that time they were behind the Iron Curtain and socialism was a miserable experiment, where you ended up in Russia with hospitals with no hot water.

I became pretty strongly Conservative, believing in free markets and profit as being the most sensible way to run society and provide people

with jobs, and the money to provide public services.

### Were you one of Thatcher's devotees?

Yes. She totally turned the whole country around.

I started in business in the 1980s and Britain was a complete joke. For instance, I grew up with laughable cars – remember the Austin Allegro, with a square steering wheel. The way they built them, they were guaranteed to have 40 things wrong with every car. Forty!

To see how we've transformed things, I drove past Halewood yesterday. They used to produce the joke car of Ford, the Escort, now are producing Britain's most successful exported car, the Land Rover Evoque. It's astonishing the way we've turned the country around.

In the 1980s there were real lessons to be learned from Germany, the States and Taiwan – it was very marked which countries were succeeding and which weren't.

### How did you first get involved in politics?

In the 1987 election I helped John Biffen here – he was a long-standing MP and I helped him for three weeks. In 1992, I stood in Wrexham, where I got 18,114 votes – and was thumped in the face, which caused a lot of national exposure.

### Who thumped you? A constituent?

Well, they were shouting 'We are Labour, we are Labour' which was a bit of an indication of their political allegiances...

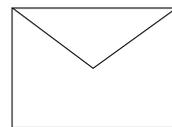
I had put some flags on my Land Rover – a couple of Red Dragons and Union Jacks – and they had torn them off. It led to a court case, which I won...

### Labour won in Wrexham, so your Westminster dream was dashed...

I then got involved with two big charity projects. There was a move to close a number of cottage hospitals in Shropshire and I was involved in the Ellesmere campaign. I remember going to a conference about Trust Hospitals in London when Ken Clarke was the health secretary.

In the end, what we did – which was disgraceful really, seeing the Jebb family had given the hospital free to the town of Ellesmere for perpetuity – was to buy the hospital for a quarter of a million, which was a lot of money in those days. We then raised another quarter of a million to do it up as a nursing home. We had the upstairs as a nursing home, and let the county council run the downstairs as a day care centre.

I was in charge of the nursing home for a while but the real stars were a wonderful matron who had been head of nursing at the Orthopaedic and Olga Cureton, who was key to the whole campaign.



### What do you think?

Is North Shropshire well served by having Owen Paterson as MP? What are your impressions? Write to us at 16-18 Oswald Road, Oswestry, or send an email to [news@bordercountiesadvertiser.co.uk](mailto:news@bordercountiesadvertiser.co.uk)

# The high, the lows



Owen Paterson in his early years as an MP

OWEN PATERSON has had quite a career in politics. He has held some high-powered positions in the government, and has never been afraid to speak his mind.

Now, though, he is somewhat on the outside looking in.

David Cameron likes to be surrounded by like minds. And Mr Paterson, with his forthright views on Europe, is most certainly not that.

So what is life like now for a Conservative MP used to positions of power?

He's not bitter – far from it. He's still outspoken, he still has firm views on the environment, on fisheries, on Northern Ireland... and, yes, he's particularly forthright about Europe.

## In his own

Today, exclusively in the *Advertiser*, the North Shropshire MP talks frankly about his career – the positions of office he had held, the day he was thumped by a constituent, and how he first fell out with David Cameron.

He spoke about about Europe in last week's *Tizer*, so we have stayed away from that subject today. But he still had plenty of topics to choose from.

We have also stayed away from party politics. This about Owen Paterson the MP – not about the colour of the rosette he wears at election time.

From there, I was asked to join the Institute of Orthopaedics which is their research organisation. They had been given a big bequest to put up the Arthritis Centre, and I ended up in charge of that.

There were all sorts of complicated Treasury rules that meant we couldn't get access to the significant donation – I think it was about £1 million – and we were in danger of getting stuck and losing the whole lot. In the end we drove it through, and we got the Arthritis Centre up on time and pretty much to budget, and it's still there now.

### And politics?

Well, around the autumn of 1996 John Biffen rang me and said this was the call you didn't want to hear – he was retiring. I put in – along with 198 other people – and I was lucky enough to be selected.

### Really? 198 others?

I think nine of the others became MPs, which is quite interesting.

The election came in May 1997 and I successfully trashed John Biffen's 16,000 majority, down to a miserable 2,195. I was up against Ian Lucas, a thoroughly good guy who is now the MP for Wrexham. It was the year of the great cull of Conservative MPs. So I've been doing this job for 18 and half years.

### You've had some very high-profile roles in government in that time.

I have, but I've still made local issues a top priority – it doesn't matter how busy you are with other things, local issues are the most important.

People were very understanding. The pay-off is that if you're in the Cabinet, other Cabinet members have

to reply to your letters, and there is a bit of networking.

### What was it like as a backbencher in the early days?

I was very busy doing questions. In those days, John Bercow and I used to sit next to each other and we'd have competitions – who could ask the most questions, the shortest question, which I won...

### What was the question?

It was 'Who pays for this?' Betty Boothroyd slapped her thigh and said 'Marvellous, I love these short questions...'

### It was tough, though, being in opposition?

I think we had fewer Tory MPs than the Labour majority, so we were going nowhere and in complete disarray. It fell on the 32 new MPs to do a lot of the work. We were always being asked to speak in debates, put on a Bill Committee – I ended up being on three Select Committees, Welsh, Agriculture and Europe. And I was a Whip briefly – it was interesting in the Whips' Office, and good to learn how it all works.

### Who was the Tory leader then?

William Hague. Then we had another election, Hague went, and Iain

Duncan-Smith (right) called me, and I ended up helping him with his campaign. We got him elected leader – just – and I was his PPS for most of that next parliament.

### What did it entail, being his Parliamentary Private Secretary?

Well, it was a very different experience but incredibly hard work. I did a lot of admin in his office, going on trips with him – we re-established the Oswestry-Washington link...

It was building up to the Iraq war and I went with him and met President Bush – I dealt with Bush's team, who were very concerned about the vote in the House of Commons.

Then Iain was deposed and I emerged from the wreckage and Michael Howard became the leader.

### What role did you have then?

I was sent off to be the junior Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. I took up the case of bovine TB – I asked more questions on one subject than any one MP in history, which was more than 600 Parliamentary Questions on bovine TB. I went to Michigan and Washington to see what they were doing with bovine TB and talked to their vets. We needed to follow the examples of Australia, New Zealand, the USA, France, Germany and Ireland and remove diseased wildlife. In those countries it was wild water buffalo, possums and white-tailed deer, while here it was the badger.

Here, we are testing and removing diseased cattle but we are not removing diseased wildlife, so it's no surprise the disease carries on.

I also came up with a comprehensive Green Paper. I went all around the coast of the UK as well as to the Falklands, Norway, Faroes, Iceland, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New England, and wrote a comprehensive paper on how to run a sane fisheries policy using modern technology.

It began with the sentence: 'The Common Fisheries Policy is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster; it is beyond reform.' And I wouldn't change a word of it. And most of the paper, 10 years on, is still absolutely relevant.

### Why is it so unworkable?

It's insane to try to run such a localised activity from continental level. To try to impose quotas means if you catch something that is not in the quota, you chuck it back. We have chucked back over a billion tons – that's one thousand million tons – of

dead fish that were very healthy that are now rotting at the bottom of the ocean as pollution. It's idiotic. No-one else in the world runs such a stupid policy. It's a disaster.

### But the policy got in the way of your relationship with David Cameron...

It was a bit of a sticking point. He was head of policy at the time, and I worked with him on the Paper – he changed only the political bits, not the technical bits. But when he became a candidate for leader in 2005, he made it clear he was going to drop the fisheries paper.

I had met a couple of hundred fishermen at our conference and I had promised them I would not vote for any leadership candidate who did not stand by my fishing paper. We had a ridiculous stand-off with the Cameron team, who were very keen for me to support them. On the last night we had some late votes and I said we needed to resolve it.

By this time, it was becoming perfectly obvious that David Cameron was going to win and that David Davis was going to get buried. I spoke to David Cameron and congratulated him on a great campaign, said he was going to win the next day, but that unless he changed his idea on the fishery policy, I couldn't support him as I had given my word to the fishermen.

### Did he change his tack?

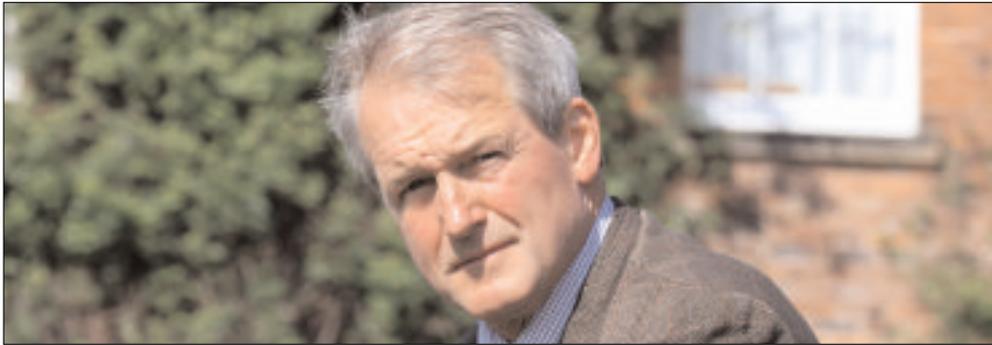
No, he wouldn't move, not surprisingly, so I went to David Davis and told him he had fought an appalling campaign, was going to be buried the next day, but that if he would back my fishing paper, I would vote for him. He said he would, so I did.

### And David Cameron got in...

It was actually quite sporting of David to give me an important shadow job, Shadow Minister of State for Roads. It was very interesting. I went to 14 European countries, as well as the States and Canada, to get a huge amount of material

# and all the rest...

words, Owen Paterson talks about life as an MP



on how to run an innovative, modern roads policy.

## What would that entail?

Having shared spaces, scrapping traffic lights, scrapping a lot of road signs and regulation, and using incentives – for example, having an incentive-based driving licence scheme, where you get bonus points for good behaviour and not having accidents. At the moment, all you do is lose – you get penalties and go backwards, you can't go forwards.

## And then you got a role in Northern Ireland...

I was Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for three years, from 2007 to 2010. The Agreement was settling down, and I went across a minimum of one day a week – I treated it almost like a constituency. It was very interesting.

## Not all good, though?

No, some appalling things. I remember there had been a murder, an awful murder, where a young man had been beaten to death with iron bars in a cow shed, and I went to the cow shed and met his relatives...

There was peace in Northern Ireland at the time, but the dissidents hadn't accepted it.

I became the real Secretary of State in 2010. A real problem was the IRA couldn't get all their guys to stand down, so we had splinter groups with some very dangerous people. That was something I had to address as soon as I became Secretary of State. One of the first things I did was to get a lot of extra money in to re-equip the security forces. We really had to crank it up.

## It wasn't all security, though...

My other big campaign there was to get devolution of Corporation Tax. I was acutely aware that just over the border they had 12.5 per cent tax, and towns there were booming when places like Londonderry weren't – and it was obvious



David Cameron

the Corporation Tax was the key.

I was told firmly by someone very senior in the Treasury that I needed to have an exit strategy as this was never going to happen – so I was delighted last year when it went through. It will be completely transforming.

## And after Northern Ireland?

I was asked to go to Defra. I picked up on the TB stuff, where they were going to start culling diseased animals but they were going to shoot them, which was quite controversial.

We had a lot of dramas while I was there – TB and the badger cull, and Chalara, an appalling problem with ash trees which, I am afraid, is going over time to remove our ash population. This had partly blown in after causing damage to the tree population in Poland as early as the 1990s, and I was amazed we didn't know about it.

## Did you want to move from the Northern Ireland role? Were you given a choice?

There are things in Northern Ireland, and with Defra, that I regret that I didn't get finished – like the Corporation Tax.

But when you get told you're changing roles, or losing roles, it's instant. You don't go back to the office. Your stuff is sent on in a cardboard box.

## It's brutal?

Yes, it's extraordinary. You're not necessarily told why you are changing roles – just that it has been decided to make

some changes.

I left Defra when I was working on many projects and it was frustrating to be fired when I had some of them in sight to be finished.

## So why were you fired?

Good question. The explanation to me, as I remember, was that there was a party to run and people needed to be moved on. Everyone has to have a sniff at the fly whisk. You'd better ask Number 10 about that...

## Did it leave you feeling bitter?

I was pretty fed up and I didn't make any attempt to hide it. I had all these projects going, which I was driving through. It was my natural background – I grew up on a farm.

## What did you tackle after that?

I set up UK2020, which last year I used to make a number major speeches. We're working on several policy areas so when we have a leadership contest, we will have a proper range of policies to see if the candidates will adopt them.

## Do you see yourself one day getting back into a position of influence and authority in the government?

I don't at the moment because I'm one of the founder members of Vote Leave – we began by having meetings in my office, and I think that's not popular in Number 10. I'm absolutely clear, we should vote to leave the European Union at the first possible opportunity, and have a completely new relationship based on trade and co-operation. But you don't need to be run by them. We should make our own laws in our own parliament. That is not the current view in Number 10.

## So do Number 10 see you as a rogue MP?

I don't know what they think actually – they leave me alone. I haven't been back there, no-one's been in touch with me –

they let me get on with it.

## Would you want to get back to a level of responsibility?

Yes, depending on what the conditions were. Having been through it, without being blasé, I know exactly how to be a minister. So I'd want to be able to get things done, and I'd want to be able to do them in a way I thought was right. I wouldn't want to be a minister just to be a minister. It also rather depends who will be in charge...

## David Cameron won't be leader for ever...

Well, David Cameron said he would go by 2017, didn't he. It probably rather depends when the EU Referendum is. He'll have to go after that.

## Floods are back in the news. Is it all the fault of global warming?

Blaming global warming is a cop out. We have had very heavy rain for centuries and it will continue to rain hard. In Cocker mouth, for example, which was flooded recently, 90 per cent of the rain lands in the hills. If you have really heavy rain, it goes wallop, down the rivers. And if you don't dredge the rivers, which they haven't done, you're going to get problems. They always used to dredge gravel on that river.

## Comedian Jason Manford blamed you for the floods, because you didn't do enough as Environment Minister...

Take the Somerset Levels, which I was very much involved in. Ninety per cent of the water lands on the Levels, which is an artificial landscape dug out first



Jason Manford

by medieval monks and then the Dutch under Charles I. The whole landscape is 20ft below sea level. The rivers there are

large, open drains. It was idiotic to have someone from the RSPB in charge of the Environment Agency who said her policy was to put a limpet mine on every pumping station. That's why it gummed up.

I went there one Sunday evening and got some local experts together, and we decided very rapidly what needed doing. We dredged the main rivers, re-established the role of the internal drainage boards with a wider remit to do the long-term maintenance, we set up a Somerset Rivers Authority to bring everyone together so they all talked. And we also talked about long-term projects, like putting a barrier across the river, and doing some remedial work to keep the water up in the hills.

And despite some very heavy rain recently, which would have caused floods before our remedial action, there has been no flooding. So I am completely vindicated.

## Nothing to do with climate change? Is there such a thing as climate change?

The climate changes all the time. The evidence is the world is not warming as predicted. In the past 17 or 18 years there has been a pause which no-one has managed to explain, which none of the forecasts said would happen. By concentrating on this one issue, we are missing much, much more urgent environmental issues where we could take direct action and have an impact.

I got very involved with wildlife crime. We are losing an elephant every 15 minutes. We are losing a rhinoceros every nine hours. We will run out. There will be no more. That's an immediate crisis. It's happening today. And we could do something about it with international co-operation which is why I helped instigate the London Conference in 2014 which has led to real progress.

That's what I think we should be concentrating on.

I'm completely prepared to accept the theory that if you pump out a lot of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere that it's going to increase the temperature, but so far these alarmist forecasts have not happened and I think it's an enormous distraction from much more immediate environmental problems.

In the 16th and 17th centuries there were some incredibly cold winters when the Thames froze over. There was a medieval warm period when vines were grown in Greenland. There was a Roman warm period. There was the Holocene when the Arctic melted, and there was no man-made CO<sub>2</sub> around at all.

## We're not running out of polar bears and bees...

We're not, no. There has been a big increase in polar bears. There's a big problem in Spitzbergen because there are too many polar bears. And we're not running out of bees. There has been an increase in bees.

The problem is the green groups have to have a sense of crisis, they have to create dramas, and have hate figures like me – they're big internationals with substantial staff and big programmes to run and they have to keep the money coming in, so they need

crisis and drama.

## What are the big local issues in your weekly postbag?

Planning is one of the biggest. We have a conundrum – as the population increases, we have got to put houses somewhere. But I totally sympathise with people in small villages with modest facilities having houses dumped on them, without the roads, the infrastructure, the public services. That all needs planning.

Letters about health have drastically reduced.

## What about the proposal to have one emergency hospital, Telford or Shrewsbury?

I'm very keen on the plan to have Urgent Care Centres to do the vast majority – 70 or 80 per cent – of the A&E work, which can be done here in Oswestry, to save people having to go to Shrewsbury. To be honest, I'm not really fussed who gets the Emergency Care Centre, Shrewsbury or Telford. It's still a good drive from Oswestry.

## Is it right that a local council can use public money to campaign to have the Urgent Care Centre in its town?

It's ridiculous to me – a complete waste of public money.

## Finally, you're a Conservative, and the Conservatives are constantly telling councils to save money, and cut, cut, cut. Why are we in such a mess?

Because Gordon Brown left the country borrowing £300,000 every minute; there comes a certain point when we break the national credit card.

In Shropshire, Keith Barrow made a big reduction in expenditure from a low base, and yet I've had incredibly few letters of complaint about the services. What they've done is learn to deliver the services in a much more efficient manner.

## The fat has been cut off the bone. Is the bone now being cut? What happens then? Will the cuts be too deep?

It may be there will be some things the council will have to stop doing, yes. There may be some activities they just don't do. That's what the consultation is all about.

## How much longer do we have to suffer cuts before we see some light at the end of the tunnel?

We are now growing the economy, and the faster we grow it, the more we grow tax revenues. Simple as that. But we're not out of the woods yet. We're still borrowing at a considerable rate. It's a lot better than under Brown, but it's now about £130,000 a minute. That's still a hell of a lot of money.

What I find extraordinary is that young people are not enraged by this. They're the ones who are going to have to pay for it. We're enjoying nice hospitals and building new roads and schools. Our generation is enjoying it. Their generation, if we go on this way, will have no money as it will all go on debt interest. There won't be any new schools for them. They should be furious with this generation.