

Norman Baker: a RHUL alumnus in Parliament
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Norman Baker, Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes and Under-Secretary of State for Transport was a student at Royal Holloway in the late seventies. In an interview with 'The Andrew Marr Show on Insanity Radio' (Wednesdays 08:00 to 10:00) he talked about his experiences at Royal Holloway and his career in politics.

You completed a BA in German and History at Royal Holloway in 1978. Did you enjoy your time here?

I did it was a very formative time and it changed me considerably as a person, I think I came out a more mature person than when I went in and I guess that happens for many students.

In particular what it did do was give me the opportunity, like many other students, to be away from home for the first time for a long period and secondly give me some responsibility because as well as achieving a modest 2:2 in German it gave me my first taste of politics – not, surprisingly, in the political societies which actually weren't very strong in my day, I don't know how they are now – but actually by standing for and being elected to the chair of the bar of my residential hall.

I was elected three times to that post. It taught me about elections and it taught me about campaigning and it also taught me a bit about business because as we negotiated with the brewery companies in what was effectively a free-house to get the best possible deal for the money we had.

So you were obviously involved in politics in terms of being elected to positions and campaigning, did you know vaguely where your opinions stood for the future, did you consider yourself to be a Liberal Democrat at that time?

I did consider myself a Liberal, there were no Liberal Democrats in those days but I was Liberal. I didn't know much about it but instinctively I think liberalism doesn't die as an idea it is one of the great ideas in politics and it can't be extinguished; the idea that you respect the individual, you want them to prosper, let a thousand flowers bloom.

All those sorts of ideas cannot be extinguished so that is where I was coming from. I also had a concern about the way the environment was being treated and no-one was really articulating that apart from the Liberals so I was very at home with the party and voted for them. I didn't do anything really specifically for the party until about 10 years after I had left university.

So this wasn't something you were entertaining as a career while you were at university?

Not at all, when I said I was involved with politics at university what I meant was 'small p' politics by campaigning and being elected to internal positions. There was hardly any party activity or really any party activity at the time. No I didn't know what I was going to do. In those days the number of students who went to university was much smaller than it is now, about 10% of the population went to university, and the reason many of us went there was it was perceived to be the case that if you had a degree, you got a good job.

So I went to study German, not because I particularly wanted to study German but because I was good at it and that was my best chance of getting a good degree. In the end I spent a good deal of time doing things other than studying as many students doubtless do and ended up coming out with a 2:2. I didn't know what I wanted to do until I left and I went through a number of jobs before I settled into doing what I am doing now.

In 2010 Norman was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport within the coalition government by Prime Minister David Cameron MP. Since taking up the role he has announced on behalf of the government, amongst others things, the £560million Local Sustainable Transport Fund, a crackdown on Blue Badge abuse, and a £10million fund to support community transport services.