



## View from the sidelines

Clive Chamberlain, chairman of Dorset Police Federation

# ‘Ordinary coppers’ are honoured by orange brigade for extraordinary acts

I have visited Number 10 Downing Street on a number of occasions, but never lose sight of what a privilege it is to be allowed behind the well-known ‘bible black’ door to this historically significant London town house.

Number 10 has remained the seat of power from where 52 Prime Ministers have run their governments, implemented policies, made world-changing decisions and entertained dignitaries from around the globe for over a century.

I was most recently there in July together with officers nominated for the Police Bravery Awards, and again experienced a feeling of following in the footsteps of great leaders such as Sir Winston Churchill, who gazes benignly from his photograph on the famous staircase along with the other ghosts of Downing Street.

It is a year since my previous visit and gone is the informality of Gordon and Sarah Brown, supplanted by the more starched David Cameron, who emits that ‘soigné insouciance’ which speaks of success. The reception took place in the large garden at the back of the house; an addition to the hospitality this year was the wine and cold beer, with an absence of last year’s

assortment of herb teas, which to me look and smell fantastic, but disappointingly all taste the same – of nothing!

Colleagues found it quite surreal that here they were, ‘ordinary coppers’ supping wine and lager with the great and good on Mr Cameron’s lawn! The reality was that each of them had demonstrated extraordinary bravery in order to be enjoying this moment and had most certainly earned their right to be there.

It was an honour to be a part of the event, and particularly good to be out and about away from the emails; although I am acutely aware of the potentially fatal consequences of not answering correspondence so will warn you too...

Spencer Perceval, whose engraving adorns the same staircase as Winston Churchill’s, was Prime Minister from 1807-1812 in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars. He and his wife had 12 children, so quite how he had the time to run the country I don’t know, but that aside, Perceval is unfortunately best remembered as the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated. John Benningham was a merchant who had incurred debts and had been locked up in a debtors’ prison. He wrote to the Prime Minister thinking that he would help to get him out of the ‘clink’. Tragically, Perceval forgot to respond to the letters and once free, Benningham, angry that he had been ignored, went to the House of Commons and shot dead the Prime Minister in the lobby. So remember, always answer your letters and emails!

Later in the day David Cameron joined nominees, chief officers and a whole range of others at London’s splendid Dorchester Hotel for the Awards ceremony. I remember wondering if there is one tanning studio that is shared by politicians and celebrities, as there was a distinctive orange hue to the evening. So much so that I think by licking some of them you might actually cure scurvy!

The dinner and ceremony went well and, having recently lost three stones in weight, I was also relieved not to have been involved in another case of mistaken identity; last year someone requested a photo with me suspecting that I was celebrity chef Clarissa Dickson-Wright.

Spencer Perceval, the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated, offers a salutary lesson on responding to public communication



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Clive’s doppelganger, Clarissa Dickson-Wright



Photography: PA/PA Archive