

Bill Bryson is a world famous author and President of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Albert Simango (Deputy MYP Kingston upon Thames) and Jack Mayorcas (UKYP London PG Rep) met up with him to talk about his current anti-litter campaign ...

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How did you come to be President of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and what made you want to get involved in this campaign?

I just got really annoyed about litter. Walking in the countryside is so beautiful, why would you want to make it ugly? I didn't know how to run a campaign so I approached the Campaign to Protect Rural England and they invited me to be their President. I am quite actively involved with the organisation but being President is a ceremonial role – like being a symbol or a frontman.

There have been other anti-litter campaigns before, what is different about this one that you feel will be able to make a clear difference?

I think the moment is right for this sort of campaign. There are lots of people who feel the same way about litter and want to do something about it. We are going to push hard and get people to join the crusade and I believe there is a real chance the message will get through. We want a clean, tidy Britain.

Did you ever drop litter when

you were young?

I can honestly say I have never littered through choice. There are times when we are in a position where we are forced to though - I recently got stopped at St Pancras when I tried to take my coffee through security to get on the Eurostar. They made me put my coffee cup on the floor! Where appropriate, authorities have more of a duty to provide waste bins.

Research showed that one of the major reasons for young people dropping litter was laziness, how can we tackle such a problem?

We need to explain through intelligent advertising campaigns that there is a consequence to dropping litter. Just as if you are caught speeding and you get points – drivers who drop litter out of their car windows should get given 3 points on their driver's licence.

If somebody drops litter what does it say about them?

It says that they aren't thinking. I can't see why you wouldn't want to keep the countryside

looking lovely. It doesn't make sense. People appreciate a clean environment. You wouldn't expect to check into a hotel room and be faced with an unmade bed!

We as a nation are behind with schemes such as bottle returns and charging for plastic bags, why do you think this is?

I think British society can be conservative. Whilst that is often a great thing and means that historical buildings and traditions are really well preserved, it can sometimes mean that as a nation things take time to change. It is the duty of the younger generation to take it forward and make changes.

What do you think is the main problem facing young people of our generation, besides littering and fly-tipping?

I think life used to be easier when I was your age. I think education is a really big issue facing young people. You have to be a lot more serious about it. It is also much harder to be an immigrant these days. When I first got here it was easy!



Bill Bryson factfile

Where's he from?

Bill Bryson was born in Iowa, USA, in 1951.

Why is he over here then?

A backpacking expedition in 1973 brought him to England where he met his wife and decided to stay and be a journalist and writer. Having gone back to the United States in 1995 he returned to live in Norfolk in 2003.

So what's he done?

He is arguably most famous for writing autobiographical travel books (Notes from a Small Island, Notes from a Big Country) as well as books on language and science (The Mother Tongue, A Short History of Nearly Everything) but has spent much of his life as a journalist for The Times and The Independent.

I see. So is he any good?

In 2006 he was awarded an OBE for his contribution to literature adding to the numerous awards he has had for his work. His writing is often funny and insightful as well as being quite accessible.

Wow, that's pretty good. So how come he likes litter then?

He doesn't! Having always been fascinated by British heritage and the beauty of its countryside he became President of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in May 2007, establishing an anti-littering campaign across the country. The campaign is going from strength to strength and he knows young people play a huge role in reducing litter, so that's why he interviewed with UK Youth Parliament.