

The Hippelotamus theory

Letter from Francis Bennion to the Daily Telegraph 29 April 2000 (not published)

You report (29 April) that research by Dr von Hippel of Ohio State University shows that so-called racism and other prejudice in old people arises from loss of mental faculties caused by ageing. Dr von Hippel may be right, or perhaps the explanation for these differences in outlook is otherwise.

Born in 1923, I was during my formative years brought up to be chivalrous to ladies, honour God and the King, salute the Flag, revere the British Empire, and uphold the rule of law. At my public school boys were taught to shoulder the white man's burden, keep a stiff upper lip, play the man, and observe the tradition of service. The masters told us a gentleman's word was his bond, and that the motto was never apologise, never explain. All that made those of us who are left the people we are.

Many of my generation think that the values we were trained to respect in our youth are not invalidated merely because some of the present generation think differently. Things are not true just because people of today say they are true. People of tomorrow may say other things are true.