

lars rindsig's view from the right



Recently, UK's Channel 4 showed a programme called "The Yorkshire Clamper." It portrayed Ted Evans, the owner of a private car park in the prototypically idyllic village of Haworth in West Yorkshire, best known for being where the Brontë sisters lived and worked, and for its winding, cobbled streets being filled with Morris men during the Christmas season.

Mr Evans and his company, Carstoppers, is—so the Channel 4 website tells us—spurned by the locals and feared by tourists. Evans is notorious for his practice of clamping illegally parked vehicles—indeed, the programme shows us outraged shoppers complain to Tony the car park attendant, over their cars being immobilised and having to pay their £75 fine. "We came back plenty of time before [the hour was up]—and it's because we're parked slightly in the bay behind," says one flabbergasted lady, gesturing towards her car—one third of which occupies one parking bay and two thirds another. "Yeah, well, it's disgoosting", says another, furious.

While Mr Evans and Tony are keen and unapologetic clampers, they don't randomly target drivers—only those who park for longer than they have paid for, those who *don't* pay, or those who prefer to park across several spaces. The terms of using the car park (and the repercussions for being in breach) are clearly posted on signs at the entrances.

This would have been mostly a local eccentricity, a very English—almost *Archers*-like—feud between villagers, if it hadn't been that former Speaker of the House of Commons Betty Boothroyd's car was clamped during a home trip North. Baroness Boothroyd was wholly unamused. When also the Tory shadow roads minister, Robert Goodwill MP, witnessed a clamping of his own (though not of his own car, but that of an elderly couple who had parked without paying), the ball really got rolling. Clamping was now a political issue. Politicians never being late to spot a profitable cause launched an attack, aided by the AA, on the practice of wheel-clamping on private land, seeking to ban it in England and Wales, just as the Scottish Parliament has done in its jurisdiction.

But wait a minute. Whatever happened to keeping contractual obligations? By parking in Mr Evans' ChangeGate car park, drivers agree to adhere to a given set of rules. If the rules are broken, Mr Evans' man Tony clamps the car, as it is just about the only certain way of making rule-breakers own up to their transgression. "A disgrace", says Baroness Boothroyd. But surely it is not. Or are agreements not meant to be honoured when they become inconvenient to one party?

Another, perhaps more interesting, aspect is to consider the car park a microcosm of the economy as a whole.

In that respect, parking space is not unlike living space. Everybody wants the parking closest to the shop they're going to and most shielded from other drivers. Indeed some drivers prefer two or more spaces so they don't have to share. Similarly, everybody wants to live close to work, shopping, services and infrastructure, and want as much space as possible. In both cases they want the best location free. "A disgrace", says the Baroness when someone tries to charge her for wanting the best location for herself: and the same say property owners, at the prospect of being charged for the privilege of occupying the best locations. "Yeah, well, it's disgoosting!"

Mr Evans, the Yorkshire Clamper, says in the film that someone's car is like an extension of their home. How right he is.