

# MONDAY PEOPLE



Jimmy Carter — "give us a broom"

## The friendly force

Edward Vulliamy on Tyneside sees a former US president and a chartered accountant together celebrating 10 years of breaking down barriers between people

FOR Tony Coates, American Independence Day began at 6.30 am with a jog along the A695 in the quiet, early sunshine of the rural Tyne Valley.

A committed Americophile, Mr Coates usually acknowledges the Fourth of July in some way or other, but 1987 was rather different, for among his jogging companions was the 39th President of the United States, Jimmy Carter.

Mr Carter, at 62 years old, set a brisk pace for the three-and-a-half-mile run. The day before, he'd been in Leningrad, and had spent previous days in Moscow with Mikhail Gorbachev. But now, with his wife Rosalyn, he was passing the weekend at the Coates homestead in Riding Mill, Northumberland — and after the run, they joined Mrs Jenny Coates, Amy, aged 9, and Charlotte, aged 6, for breakfast in the summer house.

Mr Carter was to spend his July 4 as the main attraction on an independence parade through Newcastle. Its purpose would be to celebrate the tenth anniversary of an organisation called the Friendship Force, which Mr Carter launched in 1977 shortly after becoming President, of which Mrs Carter is chairperson, and which has bestowed on Newcastle an unusual degree of international attention.



Tony Coates — thirst for knowledge

Friendship Force operates simply: it arranges for people from all over the world to go and stay in each other's homes, and it now has a million members of 300 branches in 46 countries, the latest of which is the Soviet Union.

The first exchange was in 1977, between 381 Georgians from Mr Carter's seat of Atlanta, and 381 Geordies from the city he visited on his first overseas trip as President, and which adopted him as a local hero without reservation. This weekend, 280 of the organisation's "ambassadors" were being hosted in Newcastle.

Mr Coates, whose three-man chartered accountancy handles the affairs mainly of local farmers and doctors, was on that first exchange, not because he tends to share the Friendship Force's ultimately religious aims of world friendship and peace, but because: "I itched to go to America. I only knew one American, at my school, and I wanted to know more. And I didn't want to stay in hotels."

He became the UK representative of the organisation and, as a result, met and befriended Mr Carter. "He showed me round the peanut farm. We even watched the first Mondale-Reagan TV debate together."

Friendship Force was not the brainchild of Mr Carter but of one of his friends in Georgia, also in Newcastle for the celebrations. On Friday night the Reverend Wayne Smith flew in.

Mr Smith is minister of the Big Canoe Presbyterian Church in Georgia. While a missionary in Brazil he came up with the idea of "breaking down the barriers in the world by creating friendship and understanding through people staying in each other's homes, not in hotels, and discovering each other's cultures." The then Governor Carter was in agreement, and had backed it. "Actually, I'm a Reaganite," said Mr Smith, chirpily.

Not there to greet Mr Carter was the woman who negotiated basing the force on Tyneside — a former Labour mayor, Mrs Theresa Russell. She had guests of her own to see to, Mr and Mrs Bud Sereteau from Florida. "He's a multi-millionaire with a golf course in his back garden. I've only got three dustbins in mine."

After breakfast Mr Carter sat on a bench in the back garden, one Coates daughter on each knee, and mused on his still tenaciously-held political ideals and aims with a characteristic and pensive gentleness, for which many Americans are now said to yearn again.

He ruled out any possibility that he would seek the Democratic nomination, as many wish him to do. "I am not ever going to seek public office again, but if a President, in

office wanted me to do a specific task I would do that."

He added: "I am still working on the same issues as when I was President. I still have access to world leaders, but now there other advantages. I can speak more freely, I can concentrate on the things I consider to be most important, I can look into more things in more depth... and speak to more people."

"I still work on peace in the Middle East; if I want to talk to Palestinians, I have the freedom to do so."

Now based at his own Carter Centre in Atlanta, he said the same flexibility applied to his other areas of interest — the prevention of famine, the welfare of children and arms reductions. Mr Gorbachev was "a great innovator" and "the most exciting leader on earth" who, during his talks in Moscow, had shown "a real interest in very constructive proposals for arms control."

The Friendship Force has grown in Mr Carter's life from an interest to an enthusiasm. His motives for involvement were "based on religious and political grounds," and the organisation's progress had "surpassed our best hopes" particularly in the Soviet Union and China. Nevertheless, he hoped to slip away from the weekend's celebrations at some point "and go to a nice English pub."

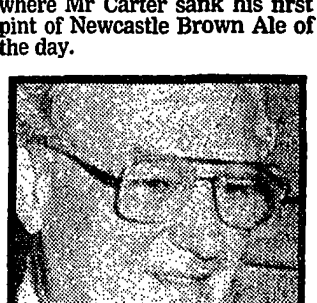
Mr Carter was manifestly more at home in the garden with children on his knees than during a rather tortuous journey in the Lord Mayor's horse-drawn ceremonial carriage, surrounded by liveried footmen.

Mr Carter stopped the coach and demanded to change places with the footman at the back, atop the vehicle, to the glee of the crowds. Then he alighted to chat, causing the security men to wince.

Parade and formal lunch over, the Coates took the Carters to see Hadrian's Wall, picking up Amy Coates's friend Jessica Foster on the way. "What's your name then?" asked Mr Carter. "Jessica," replied the little girl. "Hiya, I'm Jimmy," he said, and they talked about Romans.

The visit to the wall was shorter than planned, because Mr Carter had seen a game of cricket in the village of Humshaugh, and wanted to return to catch a bit of play. The rules were duly explained, and he enjoyed a few overs.

Before the gala dinner, there was only one principal task left. It was completed at the Wellington pub in Riding Mill where Mr Carter sank his first pint of Newcastle Brown Ale of the day.



Wayne Smith — missionary for friendship

"Newcastle is the capital of friendship," Mr Carter told the guests and hosts at the gala dinner. Mr Coates said: "Exactly 10 years ago today I was having my first Budweiser and watching baseball," and Mrs Carter announced a big exchange she had just organised between people from 45 American states and all the Soviet republics.

Mr Carter recalled that he'd made something of a hit on his last visit by greeting a crowd of 25,000 with a raucous "How'ay the lads!" Now, he said he'd learned a new local line from Mr Coates. "It is 'give us a broon,' and it means 'I'd like a glass of your Newcastle one and only brown ale'."