

# Once More with Feeling

Alton Assembly Rooms 16 January 2013  
Text of talk with live links and references

## **Continuing from an exact repeat of the [2006 talk in Edinburgh](#)**

### **Bringing the Story up to date**

So here we are, six and a half years later. The little girl whose face I used for my last slide is now eight, and as you see her gaze is as penetrating as ever. As I said in my lecture, I excused myself from the rest of the meeting and took an early train home. I remember the glorious sunshine through lowland Scotland and past the Lake District that day. The Basingstoke train from Edinburgh goes through Oxford, so I simply got out there, met my wife, and found that our daughter and the baby that had been born that morning were already home. Here is the photograph I took. That baby is now six and a half. Here he is playing with the guitar we made together when he visited us last year.

Why have I made this account so personal? — Because I think it may be a way of getting through to people. Heaven knows, so many other attempts, by far better qualified people than me, have failed.

And why am I doing this talk here in my home town? On a subject on which I am no expert. An expert, if you remember the old definition, is "*someone who comes from somewhere else and brings slides*". And why am I doing it here when I know the truth of those words of Jesus "*A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house*"? [[Matthew 13:57](#)] — Well, I suppose the answer is that I have a reputation here, and so many friends, and that may help as well. And I think I have an opportunity to make a difference, however small.

And finally, why in this room? — That one is simple — this room is one of my favourite places in the world. I have had some of the happiest and most rewarding moments of my life on this very stage. For a little light relief (and don't we just need it!) here are half a dozen pictures taken here of roles I have played in *Alton Operatic and Dramatic Society* shows. Can anyone name the shows. . . ?

- >Tevye – *Fiddler on the Roof* – 1996
- >Pluto – *Orpheus in the Underworld* – 1997
- >Brazil – *La Vie Parisienne* – 2003
- >Jack Point – *Yeomen of the Guard* – 2004
- >Lord Chancellor – *Iolanthe* – 2007
- >Pirate King — *Pirates of Penzance* — 2009

And now – before I hand over to John to chair the discussion, I want to spend a few more minutes bringing the story a little up to date.

Perhaps the key point was in the original 2005 *New Generalist* article which led to me being invited, and it is more like *eight* years since I was writing that:

*"What I can't understand is the vitriol that comes from the ecosceptic camp. [. . .] If someone flags down your car and tells you they think the road over the crest of the hill may be starting to subside into a quarry, the normal reaction is to be grateful. Or at least to slow down. Only a complete imbecile would step on the gas and shout invective about the human right to party. Of course the warning may be a hoax, or the person may be wrong, but the sensible thing is to take appropriate precautions."*

In other words, sensible drivers hit the brake before they hit the wall.

And then I said:

*"The other thing I can't understand about the ecosceptics is their certainty."*

Now I want to take these two characteristics – the VITRIOL and the CERTAINTY — together and suggest that they might be useful signals that everyone can use in the terribly difficult business of trying to work out whose version of the climate change story they can trust. And make no mistake about it, there *are* two versions.

One of a number of relevant things that have been reported in the media this New Year was an interview with Prince Charles, who I often disagree with, but on this occasion he used almost exactly the same words that I quoted from David Attenborough and have repeated again today on my own behalf: Prince Charles said:

*"I don't want to be confronted by my future grandchild and (have) them say: 'Why didn't you do something?'"*

This was sympathetically reported on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* 7 January 2013 <http://tinyurl.com/bhb79vt>, but the comments posted on the Telegraph's website were, until I stopped looking at them, universally hostile, indeed vitriolic, and they were also certain (the spellings are as posted):

nautonnier  
01/07/2013 06:03 AM

*I have excellent news for Prince Charles!*

*There is NO global warming. There has been no increase in world atmospheric temperatures for more than 15 years. The ocean temperatures are flat or even falling. This is at a time when carbon dioxide continues to rise...*

wibbling  
01/07/2013 05:03 AM

*[. . .] Climate change has been debunked as a lie, a myth and a farce. It is simply a political class con to soak us of tax.*

nyctreeman  
01/06/2013 07:11 PM

*wow ... what vacuous shallow little man this dipsh\*t is.  
his quotes are disjointed and wandering ...the man is perfectly blithering!  
is he senile already at 64?*

RightWingGraham  
01/06/2013 07:07 PM

*Good God there's always one.  
Charles, please stop meddling with stuff that you obviously know NOTHING about.  
Anyone who still believes the lies and propaganda about the failed Warming project needs their head examined.*

Notice those comments were all dated last week, but the same tone can be seen in this extract from a letter to the editor of the *Alton Herald* published 28 January, 2011, headed '**World's climate is always changing**' and typical of a number from the same correspondent:

*". . .The fact that the developed world went into hysterics at the end of the 20th century over changes in global mean temperature anomaly of a few tenths of a degree will astound and amuse future generations. Such hysteria simply represents the scientific illiteracy of much of the public, the susceptibility of the public to repetitious propaganda as opposed to the truth, and the exploitation of these weaknesses by politicians and left wing environmental promoters. . ."*

And finally, this: On New Year's Eve I left a message on the website of James Delingpole, a *Daily Telegraph* columnist, as a first experiment in contacting a few high-profile deniers to tell them about this meeting. I wanted to tell them they would be very welcome to come, but more particularly to point out how much good they could do by changing their public stance on this all-important issue. To my

surprise Delingpole responded immediately and we had an exchange of emails that afternoon, which I thought I had closed shortly before he sent this final sally (quoted here unedited and in full). This one I will let you read for yourselves, wave when you've finished:

From James Delingpole 31 December 2012 15.16

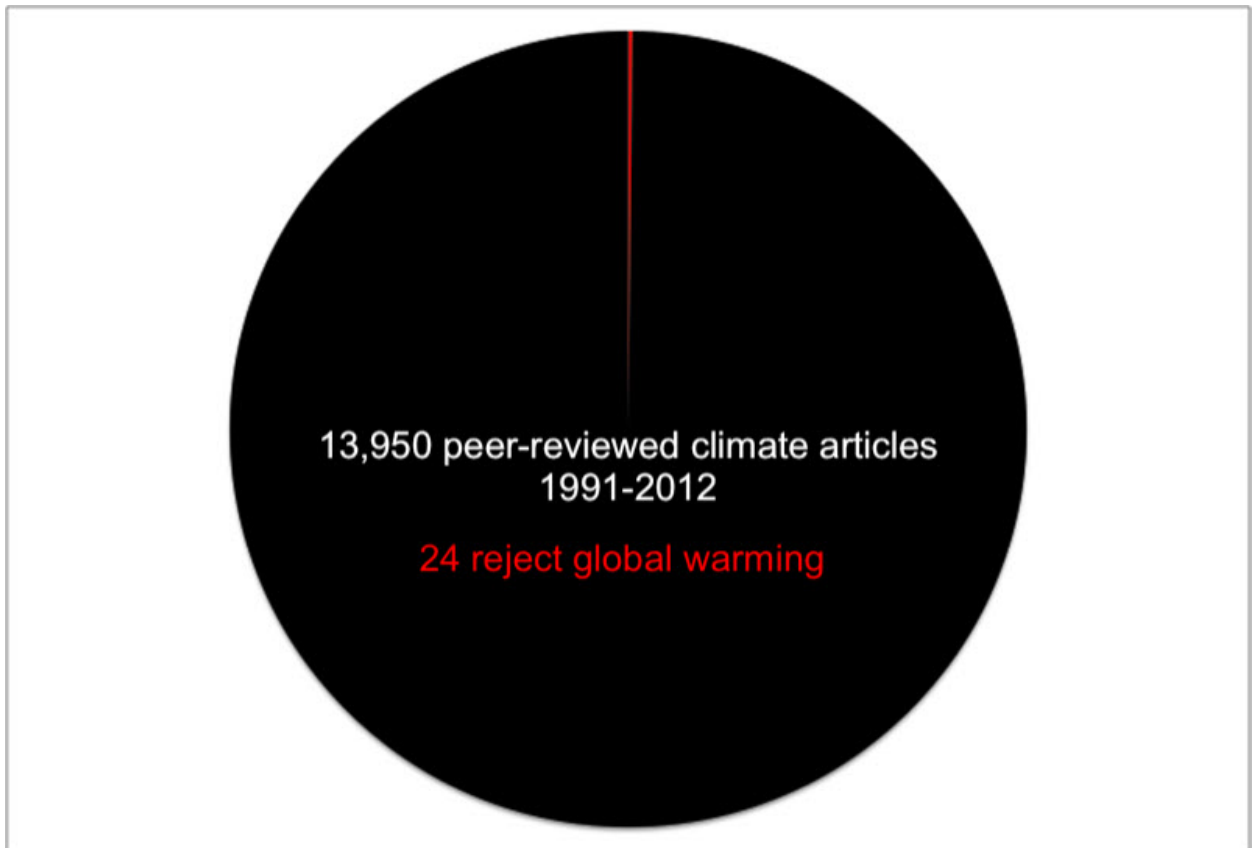
*You, sir, are a bigot and a buffoon and a time waster. The notion that you are giving keynote speeches and lectures - and thus spreading your ignorance and fear - appals me. You are quite right to stay awake at night worrying - though not for the idiotic reasons that seem to obsess you. The real problem is that your poor grandson is going to inherit a world whose values have been corrupted by the junk science, superstition and dogma formented by pillocks like you.*

So much for the VITRIOL, what about the CERTAINTY?

Science is never certain, scepticism is its absolute essence. (That, by the way, is the difference between denial, which is unscientific, and scepticism, which is) But that uncertainty does not stop some theories being so strongly supported by evidence that they compel an absolute obligation for action. The driver I mentioned earlier will never know for certain that the wall he sees ahead is not an illusion, or a trick of the light, or even some sort of painted screen like a stage set, until he actually hits it. But to wait for such certainty before applying the brakes, *especially with a car full of children*, would be regarded universally as an act of criminal irresponsibility.

Now there *is* some doubt about the scientific theory of man-made global warming. James Lawrence Powel, a distinguished American geologist, recently collected up all the peer-reviewed scientific papers published between 1991 and last November which had been indexed with the keyword phrases "global warming" or "global climate change." And sure enough he found 24 which rejected global warming. You could pick these out, and people do, and say that they demonstrate uncertainty about the science. But those 24 scientific studies came from a total of 13,950. Here is the pie chart (*next page*).

His website address is [www.jamespowell.org](http://www.jamespowell.org) , and he sets his methods out and invites you to repeat the study for yourself if you doubt his findings.



That is how real science works. Theories can be falsified but never proved beyond the smallest doubt. *Heaven knows*, scientists would love the theory of man-made global warming to be falsified just as much as anybody else does. Or indeed more than anybody else: as Powel says, a scientific study which brought real hope that man-made global warming is not happening would bring its author international fame. And one thing that *is* certain is that that has not happened.

So that's another thing I said six and a half years ago which is even more true today. The science is established far beyond the point where action is mandatory. And the deniers are left with nothing to do but rubbish science itself.

Since my 2006 address, information has come to light, in books such as "*Merchants of Doubt*", to show how denialist movements work. And to show that the techniques which they developed to deny the link between smoking and disease, between fossil fuel burning and acid rain, between CFC release and the ozone hole (and at one stage to deny that there actually *was* an ozone hole!) not to mention a range of other issues, are the same ones, often employed by the same individuals and organisations, which are now being used to deny the need for urgent action to mitigate global warming.

It seems almost impossible to credit that any sane person could behave in this way over such a grave issue which confronts us all, and I don't blame people for flatly refusing to believe that such behaviour is possible. Certainly, commercial interests alone, however selfish and short-sighted they may be, and however often the conscience of individuals is today subsumed into a kind of amoral, corporate mentality, cannot be enough to explain it. An even more important reason, convincingly documented in this book (which I reviewed for the British Journal of General Practice two years ago <http://tinyurl.com/bun443e>), seems to be a passionate antipathy to any form of central control and encroachment on individual freedom of action.

That explains why these attitudes are so prevalent in America, where these libertarian values are held so dear. As it happens I have a great deal of sympathy with these values myself, perhaps because I had two years at High School in Washington DC. And this is the kind of thing, within the context of general practice and the National Health Service, that has formed the vast bulk of my own writing and lecturing in the past. To take one example from a field in which I have some expertise, I passionately reject the notion that professionalism can be turned into a kind of machine.

But there are times when we have to accept central control. We can't all decide which side of the road we want to drive on. We can't go on refusing to listen to the experts, attacking them individually, rubbishing their institutions, deliberately generating doubt about their integrity and about their advice. We have to listen when they say, as they all do, that we haven't got another six and a half years to waste.

There are signs of a wind of change this New Year.

Hurricane Sandy in America and the recent bush fires in Australia are causing a re-examination of entrenched views in both of


## As Australia burns, attitudes are changing. But is it too late?

Raging wildfires are forcing many to rethink their stance on climate change. But there's little time left to reduce emissions



**Tim Flannery**

The Guardian, Friday 11 January 2013 18:59 GMT

 Jump to comments (332)

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those countries. President Obama has declared Global Warming to be one of his top three priorities for his second term. He is considering

hosting the next Climate Summit. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat, who is committed to delivering weekly speeches on climate change from the Senate floor, said in a statement that he wanted to counteract "a concerted rearguard action to manufacture doubt about scientific concepts that happen to be economically inconvenient to the biggest polluting industries".

Here is the Guardian's first leader on New Year's Day :

" global agreement and concerted action is the only option. We don't have another planet to go to. We really are all in this together."

Here is *The Times* last week,

*"The scientific consensus, echoed by every major academic institution in the world, is that increased greenhouse gases are warming our planet, and we reject this knowledge at our absolute peril"*

This was on the day when deniers seized on a minor adjustment of air temperature projections between now and 2017 to claim that global warming had stopped. Apparently accepting this part of the Meteorological Office report as valid, they ignored the other part which said that the longer term projections, which talk about the period in which our grandchildren will grow up, are *at least* as grim as ever.

And finally, last Friday, came the Draft Climate Assessment Report by the hugely authoritative Federal Advisory Committee <http://ncadac.globalchange.gov/> , highlighted in this leading article in Sunday's Observer



## Now no one can deny that the world is getting warmer

Last week's report by America's National Climate Assessment reveals the full horror of what's happening to our planet

Editorial  
The Observer, Sunday 13 January 2013

Federal Advisory Committee Draft Climate Assessment Report

Assessment of confidence based on evidence	<p>There is <b>very high</b> confidence that global climate is changing and this change is apparent across a wide range of observations given the evidence base and remaining uncertainties. All observational evidence is consistent with a warming climate since the late 1800's.</p> <p>There is <b>very high</b> confidence that the climate change of the past 50 years is primarily due to human activities given the evidence base and remaining uncertainties. Recent changes have been consistently attributed in large part to human factors across a very broad range of climate system characteristics.</p>
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CONFIDENCE LEVEL		
Very High	High	Medium
Strong evidence (established theory, multiple sources, consistent results, well documented and accepted methods, etc.), high consensus	Moderate evidence (several sources, some consistency, methods vary and/or documentation limited, etc.), medium consensus	Suggestive evidence (limited sources, limited models, inconsistent results, emerging, etc.), low consensus

*“ There is **very high** confidence that global climate is changing and this change is apparent across a wide range of observations [...] All observational evidence is consistent with a warming climate since the late 1800's*

*There is **very high** confidence that the climate change of the past 50 years is primarily due to human activities”*

They go on to say exactly what they mean by **Very High** Confidence level:

*“Strong evidence (established theory, multiple sources, consistent results, well documented and accepted methods, etc.). High consensus.”*

Notice - no mention of certainty, and if you look at the report, you won't find a single 'pillcock' . This is the language of science.

So, one final, optimistic quote, this time from a letter in last week's New Scientist (another source of reliable information, by the way) It was from a delegate to the recent Dohar climate change summit:

*“Further to your editorial and report on the outcome of the climate change summit in Doha, Qatar, let's find the positives. I didn't hear anyone in Doha questioning the science or the need for urgent action. While many were lamenting the pace of the negotiations, the science tells us that there is still time both to mitigate and adapt: even low-lying island states can be saved if collectively we act significantly and immediately.*



*[. . .] Signing the second stage of the Kyoto protocol shows real leadership from the UK, and continued pressure from all of us should force others to follow."*

Piers Forster, Professor of climate change, University of Leeds

If I thought the situation was hopeless, I wouldn't be holding this meeting. I am an optimist. I believe humanity can do amazing things. I glory in living in this age of undreamt-of scientific advance and technology. And in this age of unprecedented popular access to our fabulously rich culture. And in this age of unprecedented liberality and freedom.

I believe we can find a solution. But we won't do it if we listen to siren voices who deny that there is a problem. We haven't got the fifty years it took to silence the organised denial of the link between smoking and disease.

I like to think that awareness of the need for action to avert climate catastrophe is building up like a super-saturated solution in a science demonstration. Just waiting for a few tiny crystals to drop in and start a chain reaction - a spreading wave of heads coming out of the sand all over the world, blind eyes popping opening, and denial suddenly becoming as utterly unacceptable and as any other public advocacy of reckless irresponsibility.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our meeting here in Alton could be one of those tiny crystals.

END

## Sources of reliable information about climate change

### **The Royal Society - Climate Change - A summary of the Science**

<http://tinyurl.com/7aewz5a> "There is strong evidence that the warming of the Earth over the last half-century has been caused largely by human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels and changes in land use, including agriculture and deforestation. The size of future temperature increases and other aspects of climate change, especially at the regional scale, are still subject to uncertainty. Nevertheless, the risks associated with some of these changes are substantial. It is important that decision makers have access to climate science of the highest quality, and can take account of its findings in formulating appropriate responses."

**Skeptical Science** <http://www.skepticalscience.com/> '*Getting skeptical about global warming skepticism*' An excellent non-technical first port of call. They also have an excellent smartphone app which gives immediate access to answers to frequently-repeated questions.

**TED Lecture - James Hansen: Why I must speak out about climate change** <http://tinyurl.com/7kns7hc>

**US National Academy of Sciences - Advancing the Science of Climate Change** <http://tinyurl.com/a3u2xu8> "A strong, credible body of scientific evidence shows that climate change is occurring, is caused largely by human activities, and poses significant risks for a broad range of human and natural systems."

**Federal Advisory Committee Draft Climate Assessment Report** <http://ncadac.globalchange.gov/> Released last Friday: 11 January 2013

**The Guardian Environment - Everything you need to know about climate change - interactive** <http://tinyurl.com/42foszz> One-stop guide to the facts of global warming, from the science and politics to economics and technology, drawn from our **ultimate climate change FAQ** <http://tinyurl.com/3y95uhq>

**Heartland Institute leak exposes strategies of climate attack machine** ... documents show how groups play up controversy to undermine confidence in well-established scientific findings [www.tinyurl.com/7q8dez6](http://www.tinyurl.com/7q8dez6) February 2012

**'Climategate' - 'the greatest scientific scandal that never really took place'** (but which was timed to undermine the 2010 Copenhagen Climate Summit) my notes and part-transcript from the President of the Royal Society's BBC Horizon Programme, *Science under Attack* [www.tinyurl.com/bkbagxf](http://www.tinyurl.com/bkbagxf) February 2011

**New Scientist Climate Change Timeline**, and links to various articles which do not require subscription <http://tinyurl.com/ylrneby>

## **Additional material about the phenomenon of Denial**

### **How to be a denialist.**

Martin McKee, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine who also studies denial, has identified six tactics that all denialist movements use. "I'm not suggesting there is a manual somewhere, but one can see these elements, to varying degrees, in many settings," he says (The European Journal of Public Health, vol 19, p 2).

1. **Allege that there's a conspiracy.** Claim that scientific consensus has arisen through collusion rather than the accumulation of evidence.

2. **Use fake experts to support your story.** "Denial always starts with a cadre of pseudo-experts with some credentials that create a facade of credibility,"

3. **Cherry-pick the evidence:** trumpet whatever appears to support your case and ignore or rubbish the rest.

4. **Create impossible standards for your opponents.** Claim that the existing evidence is not good enough and demand more. If your opponent comes up with evidence you have demanded, move the goalposts.

5. **Use logical fallacies.** Hitler opposed smoking, so anti-smoking measures are Nazi.

6. **Manufacture doubt.** Falsely portray scientists as so divided that basing policy on their advice would be premature. Insist "both sides" must be heard and cry censorship when "dissenting" arguments or experts are rejected.

Extract from

## **Living in denial: Why sensible people reject the truth**

[New Scientist, 19 May 2010](#) by Debora MacKenzie

*(Note - In the on-line article all the points made are highlighted with live-links to references which have not carried over into this pdf extract)*

Many denialist movements originate as cynical efforts by corporations to cast doubt on findings that threaten their bottom line. Big Tobacco started it in the 1970s, recruiting scientists willing to produce favourable data and bankrolling ostensibly independent think tanks and bogus grass-roots movements (see "Manufacturing doubt"). One such think tank was The Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC), set up in 1993 by tobacco company Philip Morris (American Journal of Public Health, vol 91, p 1749). TASSC didn't confine itself to tobacco for long. After getting funds from Exxon, it started casting doubt on climate science.

Such links between denial movements are not unusual. A number of think tanks in the US and elsewhere have been funded by both the oil and tobacco industries and have taken denialist positions on smoking and warming.

TASSC folded when its true identity became widely known, but its successor, JunkScience, still rubbishes tobacco and climate research and warns people not to believe any scientist who says something "might be" true or uses statistics - which pretty much covers all scientists.

Perhaps it is no surprise that some industries are prepared to distort reality to protect their markets. But the tentacles of organised denial reach beyond narrow financial interests. For example, some prominent backers of climate denial also deny evolution. Prominent creationists return the favour both in the US and elsewhere. Recent legislative efforts to get creationism taught in US schools have been joined by calls to "teach the controversy" on warming as well.