

*Who are you? (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)*

The Who, 1978

I don't know if you remember that TV quiz show, "Mastermind", with the sombre music, the dark lighting and the black leather chair? They asked the same first two questions of every contestant:

*"Your name?"*

*"And your occupation?"*

They always did that, and I always wondered why. Famously, a taxi-driver won it one year, his specialist subjects being King Henry II, Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London. The chosen specialist subject was the third question, always the most interesting part. Regency novels, birds of Europe, lots of history and increasingly, popular culture such as Blackadder and Father Ted.

It was the contrast between the routine of employment and one's interest, one's passion, one's specialism that provided the novelty and interest.

It's much the same at parties. In repressed Britain, one's occupation is usually asked even before our name: *"And what do you do?"*. Even the Queen famously asks it. Depending on the response, we consciously or unconsciously form an immediate opinion of their worth and standing in society. Banker, estate agent, accountant, doctor, racing driver, brain surgeon, window cleaner, taxi driver. Even worse, try saying "Information Technology architect" (as I used to do), in which case you get a riposte along the lines of "Oh my laptop's been running slowly, maybe you could take a look at it?"

What we British people do not do in answer to the question is say: "I'm a free-thinking, neo-liberal plutocrat with an interest in bee-keeping and voluntary work at my local hospice". Too forward I suppose, although much more truthful and informative. A shame, it otherwise gives you something to get your teeth into.

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