

Age of Majority

by **Esmerelda Weatherwax** (Feb. 2009)

In Scotland the age of majority, when a young person is no longer the responsibility of his or her parents is 16. But despite being able to own land, enter into contracts, enter into marriage without parental permission Scottish teenagers cannot vote for the government until they are aged 18, like the teenagers in the rest of the UK.

Every so often some focus group or the other puts forward the recommendation that the age of majority, or at the very least the age of franchise, i.e. voting, be lowered in England and Wales from 18 to 16.

This is illogical. I want to make the case for raising the age of majority and the voting right which goes hand in hand with it. I won't presume to say that this will be correct for all countries, just Great Britain. I will leave the age of consent and marriage alone. That is another essay and one it's too cold and wet today to contemplate.

When I was growing up the age of Majority and voting were the same age, 21. 21 had been the age of majority for centuries, that being the age by which young men had finished their 7 years apprenticeships and were about to embark on 7 years practise as a journeyman.

To digress, the age was younger in Anglo-Saxon England and girls reached majority younger than boys as they were considered to mature earlier. Cf Jewish Bat Mitzvah at 12 and Bar Mitzvah at 13.

In 1918 the At that time, the majority of boys and girls left school at age 14 and went to work straight away. By the time

they were able to vote and considered able to fend for themselves they had been working, earning, contributing and maturing in the world of work for over 6 years. Even those lucky few who went on to further and high education had qualified, or were near qualifying as nurses, teachers and suchlike. Those who were still at university had probably done National Service beforehand, or war service.

The school leaving age was raised to 15 in 1944 and to 16 in 1972.

The age of majority was lowered to 18 on 1 January 1970.

The government intends to raise the [The Times](#) I doubt those objections would carry much weight if the government decided to proceed with legislation.

I strongly disagree with the change of the minimum driving age in England. I am 16, and turn 17 right at the beginning of september. I won't be able to get to 6th form if i cannot learn and pass my driving test because there are no buses where i live. This is completely unreasonable, please think again!

The law appreciates that young people of 18 are more vulnerable than they will be once they reach their early 20s. The Children's Act of 1989 gave Local Authorities the responsibility to continue mentoring young people who had been in their care after they reached the age of 18, recognising that in a well functioning family parental care would not stop, dead, on the 18th birthday. The fact that in middle age I still often seek the advice of my 83 year old Mother-in-law does not mean that the age of majority should be raised to 55; she sometimes seeks my advice in her turn.

Offenders aged between 18 and 20 are placed in separate YOI (Young Offender Institutions), separate from the over 21 adults (and the 15-17 year olds) where they are supposed to receive 25 hours of education every week.

Maternity units provide specialist care for the very young mother up to the age of 19.

There are even regulations in the food industry as to how old an assistant must be before he can use a bacon slicer. In my youth it was 17, I think it is now 18 and after a suitable training course but I am not certain.

The very measures designed to protect, in many cases rightly so, our children and young people have had the effect of raising the age at which they achieve a practical maturity. This is not the same as their superficial sophistication, as demonstrated by a superior ability to use a computer or a mobile phone.

The arguments for lowering the age of majority to the age of 16 are very similar to those I recall when it was lowered to age 18. Some young people are keen; I recall that as a 15 year old in 1969 I felt the same.