

Hunter Davies OBE
Doctor of Letters
Durham Cathedral, 1 July 2024

Hunter Davies OBE is a prolific author, journalist and broadcaster and wrote the only authorised biography of the highly successful global band 'The Beatles'. Hunter was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2014 Birthday Honours for services to literature.

Born in 1936 in Johnstone, Scotland, Hunter moved to Carlisle when he was 11, where he grew up in the post war era on a council estate. When he moved to Durham to study, in 1954, he was the first in his family to attend university. He was an active member of University College, completing an undergraduate degree in Economic History and a teaching diploma. Hunter began his writing career at Durham on the student newspaper, the Palatinate.

He joined the paper in his third year, initially as advertising manager and then reporter and features editor. In the spring term of 1957, he was made editor. His time on Palatinate was a deeply formative experience which awakened a passion for writing and journalism and led to his future choice of career.

Upon leaving university in 1958 Hunter worked as a journalist writing for a number of publications including Punch, New Statesman, The Guardian and The Sunday Times. At The Sunday Times he was Chief Features writer, and later Editor of the Magazine. For three years he presented Bookshelf on BBC Radio 4.

Coming from a working-class background, Hunter is passionate about comprehensive schools and providing opportunities to those from less privileged backgrounds. While working at The Sunday Times in the 1970's, he spent a year observing life at Creighton School in North London. Three Sunday Times articles and the book *The Creighton Report* resulted from his passionate and in-depth journalism.

During his career Hunter has published almost 100 books, writing everything from children's books to books about collections, travel, walking and politics. He first raised

the idea of a biography of the Beatles with Paul McCartney. For 18 months, Hunter had unparalleled access to the four members of the Beatles; John, Paul, Ringo and George. The only authorised biography 'The Beatles' was published in 1968. It was an immediate bestseller and remains the definitive Beatles book.

Among other highlights in his esteemed career, Hunter wrote the novel 'Here we Go round the Mulberry Bush' in 1965, which was made into a film, and penned *The Glory Game*, a behind-the-scenes portrait of Tottenham Hotspur football club. He has also ghost-written books for several celebrities, including footballers Wayne Rooney and Paul Gascoigne. Not one to forget the youngest readers, Hunter wrote the 'Flossie Teacake', 'Ossie' and 'Snotty Bumstead' book series for children.

Durham University has featured, with fond recollections, in Hunter's 2017 memoir 'The Co-Op's Got Bananas!' The story begins with his arrival as a first-generation student from Carlisle feeling '*dazed and confused*' as he embarks on his undergraduate journey. In a detailed and fond description of his time as a University College student, he writes "*I felt Durham was totally wonderful and marvellous. Whether Durham would feel that about me remained to be discovered.*"

Hunter shares memories of taking part in the Durham Regatta, college dances and studying for his history degree. He writes, '*almost from the beginning, I was bored rigid or had no idea what was going on...I was not the academic type*'. Studious or not, in the Autumn of 1957 Hunter was elected Senior Man of Castle.

Reflecting on his adjustment to Durham University from a working-class family, he recalls (and I quote): "*People of my generation did often have a feeling of alienation from their roots as a result of going to university. It was foreign enough to them when they first arrived, till they acclimatised, but remained totally alien to them at home.*"

A supporter of comprehensive education and providing opportunities for people from less privileged backgrounds, Hunter's literary achievements are inspiring and clearly aligned with the University's ethos of embracing difference, valuing others and cultivating inclusion.

Vice-Chancellor, I present Hunter Davies OBE to receive the degree Doctor of Letters honoris causa.