

## EDITOR'S NOTES

When you receive this the festive season will be over so we take this opportunity to hope that you all had a good Christmas and New Year celebration and to wish you all a very Happy New Year. As ever at this time of year we recognise that for many the festive season is anything but festive and can be particularly difficult. We nonetheless wish everyone well.



This edition also includes our promised supplement to commemorate the end of the Great War. We promised in 2014 that we would carry at least one piece in each edition to commemorate that time and we have succeeded in this although our contributions have not all been local. Our final piece, from Bidy Rawlence, concentrates on the role of women and the somewhat, to put it mildly, uneasy relationship there was between the established Trade Unions of the time and women workers. We think Bidy's excellent piece is a fitting end to the series. In the supplement we feature Clare Marshall's visit to Ypres in November as the centrepiece - a moving reflection on the conflict and a plea for a better future which so far, at least, has fallen on deaf ears.

Our main edition, in addition to our final commemorative article on the Great War, makes reference to the National Retired Members Conference and also gives **notice of our Annual General Meeting which this year takes place on Wednesday 20th February in the Sports and Social Club at County Hall.** There will be a warm welcome for all.

The general political situation both in Norfolk and nationally remains, at the time of writing in mid December, fraught. In Norfolk we have a Tory plan to slash funding for Children's Centres which has been the subject of consultation which is now closed with a promise to reveal all on 22 January.

*(continued overleaf)*

## Activities

### Wednesday Talks

Our popular series of Winter Wednesday Talks, all at 10am for a 10.30 start, at the NCC Sports & Social Club, continue with:

On 23rd January, Caroline Spinks from NWT, "*Wildlife of Norfolk*".

On 27th February, writer Charlotte Paton presents "*The Norfolk Poacher*", and

On 27th March, Tony Olley, very much of this parish, compares "*Norwich—Then and Now*".

On **Mondays** from 9.30 am at the NCC Sports & Social Club at County Hall we continue to offer **table tennis** and a mid-morning natter over a cuppa. Other activities [short mat bowls, pool, darts] are available if there is sufficient interest.

Every month on the **third Thursday** at 2pm there is a friendly afternoon of **whist**, also at the Sports & Social club.

These activities are free of charge to our members and their guests. We should love to welcome more people to all these events so why not give it a try and join in?

**Our AGM will be at 10 for 10.30am, at the Sports & Social Club County Hall, on Wednesday 20th February, with speakers, quiz and free buffet lunch afterwards.**

### We welcome colleagues who have recently retired

We wish you all a long, happy, healthy and rewarding retirement. Do come along and join in the Section's activities, you will find a warm welcome.

If you received this edition of Backnumber by post and you have an e-mail address, please let us know by sending a message to our e-mail

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We also have a consultation on the Council's budget which plans to administer huge increases for non residential services although not for those over 65. You can never accuse the Tories of not having a plan to divide and rule. They obviously assume that all over 65s will vote for them and the rest, who are probably less likely to vote, can go to the wall. We have Mental Health Services in as bad a place as it is possible to be and a Police Commissioner who seems to think that he should attach the Fire Service to his brief. He has not been successful so far but he will keep trying.

What is the common denominator in all of this? Swingeing cuts as the austerity agenda bites ever more deep. The County Council now receives £100s of millions less from government as compared with 2012 and plans further cuts in the next 3 years. The Mental Health Trust has been decimated by Government cuts over the last few years and no doubt the Home Secretary, at some point, will support the Police Commissioner's raid on the Fire Service. We have the extraordinary revelation that one of our MPs, a Cabinet Minister no less, one Liz Truss, acting in such an indiscreet way as to be overheard in a restaurant traducing the Prime Minister and saying that what she enjoys is the thrill of chaos. Ms Truss is Chief Financial Secretary to the Treasury as we recall. Well, Ms Truss, you've certainly created chaos, about the only thing you've achieved since being in government. To our readers we say, if you live in SW Norfolk you know what to do.

And then we have Brexit. Two words. Total omnishambles. We reckon it still will be when you read this.

Letters, comments etc to [porterjames172@gmail.com](mailto:porterjames172@gmail.com) or write to UNISON Office, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH.



## A WOMAN'S PLACE – WOMEN, WAR WORK AND THE TRADE UNIONS IN WW1

The armistice commemoration this year is particularly poignant. Archives have revealed, more than ever, the horror of the trenches in the First World War. The roles of women have been more evident, too. So how did women fare in the workplace and what role did trade unions play in supporting them?

As men volunteered for the trenches during the first year of the war, there were massive labour shortages in key war supply industries like chemical and explosives manufacture, electrical and mechanical engineering and mining. One result of this demand for labour, increased state intervention and greater acceptance of collectivism was a greatly strengthened trade union movement, but most trade unions did not accept women members. Discussions with the Government over measures to increase output broke down in Autumn 1914 over '*dilution*' - the term used for employing women in jobs formerly occupied by men.

It's easy to blame the forces of patriarchy and misogyny for this, but the picture is more nuanced. The Clydeside shipbuilders stood against the introduction of women workers, describing *dilution* as 'abominable'. However Mary Macarthur, leader of the National Federation of Women Workers (set up in 1903 to provide a trade union voice for otherwise excluded women) suggested that the opposition by men to the entry of women into their trades and professions was not because they were women, but because they were cheap - and therefore competitors in the labour market.

Despite Trade Union opposition, women took up war work. In 1915, a leaflet circulated by the War Emergency Committee, signed by a wide range of women's organisations, asked women to "uphold the standard of life" of the workers whose jobs they were replacing. "While the men are fighting, you must uphold the flag at home". They were encouraged to join the appropriate trade unions, which were urged to admit them and uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work.

This leaflet was largely propaganda, defusing antipathy towards women workers. In reality, women were often poorly treated and unfairly remunerated.

← **Women workers at Boulton & Paul during WW1 (source: The Forum)**

There were a few notable exceptions: 250 women making khaki uniforms at Cleator Mill gained a 10% increase in pay after striking for 6 weeks, and the Bus Girls Strike led to equal pay for the same work.

Boulton & Paul Ltd, (familiar to most us) provides an interesting example of the way women were involved in vital war work.

Before the war, Boulton & Paul manufactured and exported pre-fabricated wood, iron and steel buildings but by August 1914, orders were being cancelled, erectors returned home, contracts half completed and bills unpaid. Disaster loomed until a War Office contract was awarded for barrack huts and stables for camps in the South and West of England. The company began tendering for more contracts. A year later, Boulton & Paul joined forces with Laurence Scott and Co to produce munitions, employing almost exclusively 'girl labour'.

Boulton & Paul became country-wide trailblazers in the employment of women - so much so that one of their forewomen was headhunted by the Ministry of Munitions. In May 1916, their directors received a signed letter from Lloyd George, thanking them for their "great efforts made in the supply of munitions" and, particularly "the whole-hearted way in which they have taken up the policy of dilution of labour and given it practical effect".

This 'whole-hearted employment of women' was probably made considerably easier by the absence of a strong, established union voice. Boulton & Paul were paternalist employers. They provided canteens and social clubs for their workers, and contemporary copies of their works' magazine *Workways* had regular features to demonstrate women as accepted members of the workforce, illustrations of women at work in the aircraft 'shops' and 'Letters from a Munition Worker' supposedly written by a woman. The letters covered many subjects, including criticising women for making a scene when Zeppelins flew over, and for grousing about the roughness of the work.

Successive editions of *Workways* never mention trade unions. The general tone suggested workers were free to raise issues with management "any time". A little anecdote in the privately published history of the war years by William Ffiske, one of the directors, gives the lie to this. A worker came to Ffiske, leading a deputation of erectors, asking for a raise. Ffiske seemed

more annoyed by the man's further demand which involved coffee for late-arrivals to work, not just for those who arrived before 8am. "Coffee is a privilege!" he stated emphatically, his paternalistic feathers well and truly ruffled, " - not a right!";! The man was sacked on the spot (though reinstated later in a more lowly post).

Women were involved in all areas of aircraft production. They built 550 FEs, 1555 Sopwith Camels and 425 Snipes. A lady superintendent was employed to oversee the welfare of the women workers, and a training school set up to teach women skills in welding, brazing, tinning and fitting.

On the munitions side, 970 women and 250 men produced over 2m fuses for shells, and a predominantly female workforce produced 53 thousand miles of wire netting for supporting trench walls.

Despite being equally competent, carrying out the same work and working the same shifts, women at Boulton & Paul were paid less than half the wages of men ( £2-2s-4d pw) and at the end of the war, their war work done, they were 'let go'.

Women played a vital role in WW1. Paid war work transformed their lives. But women were often exploited by their employers and barred from the trade unions which should have protected them. Their loyalties were pulled in all directions. The War Emergency Committee leaflet said it all :-

*"Women's task in this great crisis is a heavy one. They must suffer sorrow for the loss of brave men in battle; they must care for the children and preserve their own strength so that the children to be born shall be strong and able citizens fit for the work of repairing the ravages of war; they must bear a large share of the burdens of industry and commerce; they must close up the ranks of the male workers where they have been broken; and to these tasks they must bring the determination to preserve for the future what free combination of workers has gained in the past. Women cannot more truly express their love of their country than by helping to secure justice and well being for man and women alike".*

Then as now, a woman's place is in her union.

Biddy Rawlence

## POLICE WARNING RE SCAMS

The police have received reports of older people receiving cold calls on the telephone from people claiming to be Police Officers. The first reported incident was on 27 November 2018 and there have been others since. The reports so far come from Ashill, Diss, Thetford and Holt. The caller tells the victim that someone they know has been arrested, needs some personal items and asks for bank details so they can be purchased. Some large sums of money have been handed over in this way although others have become suspicious and ended the call.

Norfolk Police wish people to be clear that they would never ask residents for cash withdrawals or ask for bank details. If you are called by someone claiming to be a Police Officer ask for their identification number and then hang up and call 101 on a different phone. If you can't use a different phone wait at least 5 minutes before calling 101. Police Officers are happy for you to do this.

Please don't be caught out by this type of scam.

## BACKNUMBER DISTRIBUTION

In the last issue of Backnumber I asked you to consider receiving Backnumber by email. I'd like to thank those of you who decided to help the branch this way. This now means the about 600 of you get it via email. That's fantastic and we'd like to thank you.

It's possible that the last issue missed a few members so this is just a gentle nudge to you if you hadn't got round to contacting the branch with your email address.

Again if you can get Backnumber via email please let them know by emailing Leon Kilbourn at the branch office [leon.kilbourn@unisinorfolkcounty.co.uk](mailto:leon.kilbourn@unisinorfolkcounty.co.uk) and he will make the necessary adjustment. This will take effect from the first issue in the New Year.

Many thanks to you again.

Mik Pearce

## RETIRED MEMBERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE - BOURNEMOUTH 9-10 OCTOBER 2018.

The Branch was represented by Jim Porter and David Button also attended as a visitor. A full report will appear in the next Backnumber as we have space problems in this edition. The major issue was a debate, moved by the National Committee, on volunteering within the NHS. This was an initiative organised by Helpforce a Community Interest Company which it turned out had been funded to the tune of £3million by the Government. Although we were given assurances that this would not undermine real jobs Conference was not impressed and overwhelmingly voted against the motion.

This is the same Helpforce that is at the heart of the Daily Mail's volunteering campaign in the NHS and we are concerned that Unison is said to support it despite this overwhelming vote. We will investigate further and come back with advice for members.

## ....AND A FEW CORNY BREXIT JOKES

An Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman walk into a bar. The Englishman wanted to go so they all had to leave.

"A lot of Leave voters say 'Stop complaining, it's democracy!' Well democracy doesn't always work. If five people democratically elect to take your iPhone, it's a mugging."

"Why does Britain like tea so much? Because tea leaves."

Q: With Britain leaving the EU how much space was created? A: Exactly 1GB

## WHERE TO FIND US

If you have letters, comments or issues about **Backnumber**, please e-mail the Editor Jim Porter at [porterjames172@gmail.com](mailto:porterjames172@gmail.com)

or contact the Unison Branch Office at County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH. Phone 01603 222384

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