

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the spring edition of Backnumber. This issue is being distributed on a digital basis only as it is impossible to do anything else at this time. We hope but cannot guarantee that normal service will be resumed with the next edition.



It is impossible to avoid the issue of coronavirus in this edition although, with everything so fast moving, it is equally impossible to give, or comment on, advice. All we can say is keep safe and follow the government advice as it develops. It is very sad that events that we may have been looking forward to attending such as the Norfolk and Norwich Festival of the Arts and Norfolk Open Studios have had to be cancelled but there is no choice in the matter. It seems that those organising the Open Studios hope that it may be possible to reschedule for the autumn and we will look out for that and other things and report as we find.

We are deeply conscious that this period of time will exacerbate feelings of loneliness and helplessness. We would like to find ways of helping to alleviate this in some way but we have limited resources available to us. I am happy to have my e mail address used as a repository for ideas on this and we will distribute as best we can through e mail and beyond by (your) word of mouth.

In this edition we intended to carry a letter from a member who is concerned that much of the content of Backnumber is too political and should be much more balanced. We have agreed with her that her letter will be held back to the next edition to give it wider coverage and hopefully gain the views of readers. We tend to agree that we need more balance and more articles about a wider range of issues but are

interested in the view of the membership on this. We also need more people to write the articles!

However, we will continue to highlight issues of concern to our membership where we disagree with the government approach and we will campaign as vigorously as we can on, for example, Social Care which is now on the point of collapse and which will have to be rebuilt after this crisis is all over. In relation to this we are very concerned about reports of people in care homes being “forced” to sign “Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) notices. This is entirely unacceptable and we welcome the statement by the BMA, CQC, Care Providers and General College of Practitioners that this is a decision to be made by individuals in consultation with professionals and not a blanket approach based on age.

Finally, we welcome the election of Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner as Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. Both were nominated by UNISON and will be a formidable team.

Letters, comments etc to addresses at end of Backnumber. In the meantime keep well, keep safe and we look forward to resuming normal service as soon as possible.

New “Oxford Dictionary” definition.

Keyworker

A person whose work is overlooked and undervalued until the shit hits the fan.

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.

AGM 2020

Our AGM took place on 19 February at the Sports and Social Club at County Hall. It was attended by about 25 members and we also had, in attendance, Harry Humphries, Chair of the County Council, Tracey Tansley, Regional Officer with responsibility for Retired Members, Jonathan Dunning, Branch Secretary and Paul Bonham, himself a Retired Member, who is Secretary of the Sports and Social Club.

Harry Humphries spoke mainly about his support for carers, which is the theme of his year as Chair of the Council. He also stayed to lunch and mingled with the membership, which is always a good sign. Tracey seemed impressed with the work we are doing and is always hopeful that other Branch Retired Members Sections



will be active but did acknowledge that we are fortunate with the support we receive from the Branch, not something universally reciprocated throughout the Region. Jonathan, whilst deeply concerned about the finances of the Council, reported that relations with the Branch are improving and was a bit more positive than in recent years about this. Paul rounded off the morning with a very entertaining talk about the history of the Social Club and current plans to survive.

All current Officers and Committee Members were re elected and we have now 1 vacancy for a man and two for women. We are happy for self nominations and please contact the Chair, James Porter at porterjames172@gmail.com or at the Branch Office in County Hall to do so. We also are looking for someone to co-ordinate the Winter Talks and if you would like to do this then please let us know. We would be very grateful for the help. Following the postponement of the March talk we have now already filled the October and November spaces so we need speakers for January, February and March of 2021.

As ever, our thanks go to the Social Club for making the facility available and to our caterers, whose last hurrah this was as they are retiring in the summer.

Activities, none !

In these extraordinary circumstances while covid19 stalks the land our activities must be halted until further notice.

As soon as the management committee of the Sports and Social club is advised that it is safe to re-open, we shall reinstate our activities on every Monday morning, whilst on the third Thursday of each month and Winter Wednesday Talks will resume [all being well] on 28th October with a Talk on the North Norfolk Heritage Railway.

In the meantime, keep active and well.

WHAT HAPPENS

by Irene Bryden

It is not 'what happens'
But our reaction to it.

It is not the suffering
But the lessons within it.

It is not the heartache
But the letting go of it.

It is not the destruction
But the re-building of it.

It is not the stumbling block
But the stepping over it.

It is not the limitation
But the acceptance of it.

It is not the inactivity
But the creating out of it

It is not our achievement
But the free use of it.

It is not the passage of time
But the joy in each moment of it.

For a time we exist
within time - each moment
An unrepeatable miracle...



A RAY OF SUNSHINE AND GLAMOUR

At the beginning of March I went to the The Sainsbury's Centre, UEA to see the exhibition 'Art Deco By The Sea'. It was a delight.

The gallery was filled mainly by people over 65 years and who had grown-up looking at old family photos of parents and grandparents enjoying a day by the sea in all-encompassing swim suits, bathing hats and cape-styled beach towels to protect their modesty. That said; it wasn't an exhibition of black & white photos by Martin Parr; men with knotted hankies for sunhats or women raising voluminous skirts to paddle up to their knees. Instead, it displayed the clothes of the better-off middle classes as they took the opportunity to take the train to the beach towns and cities of England. The women's clothes were elegant, slim-fitting and with gently flared skirts. There was a stand of beautiful Gatsby-era women's evening dresses made of plush silk and velvet.



However, it was the architecture of these seaside towns and cities that really took my attention; the Art Deco style of the white painted exteriors of the many hotels in the posters and photos. Many with the geometric lines in their pillars and decorative finishes of the period were wonderful.

One cabinet was full of dark brown Bakelite radios or more correctly, wireless sets. We had a large wireless at home in the 1950s and my father would tune into the Light or Home service programmes. The display brought back memories of radios shows we listened to on a regular basis; always 'Workers' Playtime', 1.00 – 1.30pm during the lunch hour or as it was then, dinner time.

I never much liked the raucous panoply of comedy shows that my parents loved. I leave you to reminisce over the titles that may be coming into your heads.

The theme being a day out at the seaside, there were many posters advertising railway journeys to beach resorts near and far across the country with funfairs and donkey rides.



I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to see this joyful exhibition which, unfortunately, closed early due to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, I will end on a note of hopeful optimism. Another exhibition is due, which should be equally as good if the interwar years capture your imagination too. This is 'Art Nouveau: The Nature of Dreams'. Whilst, without doubt, it will not start as scheduled on 29th March it is due to run until 13th September 2020.

Please send an e mail or letter to *Backnumber* with any childhood memories this article may have brought to mind and we can share them in the next edition.

Jackie Mitchell.

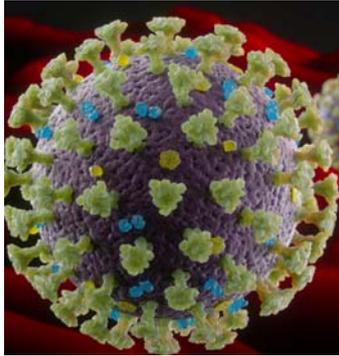
Oh, to be in England
Now that Covid's there
And whoever wakes in England
Sees on TV, smartphone and elsewhere
The shops' empty shelves and the two-metre
queues
Baying for pasta and rolls for their loos
While corvid mocks the fevered brow
In England - how?

(With apologies to Robert Browning and poetry lovers)

A HISTORY LESSON

Starting in China, probably transferring from animals to humans, it has spread across the world. It hasn't recognised national borders nor political systems nor religious beliefs. Fake news and scams have created as much fear as the disease. Travel has been curtailed and meetings and sport have been cancelled. Economic stability is threatened. Experts offer conflicting advice to those in power, who in turn offer sometimes confusing, sometimes contradictory advice to their population.

No; this is not coronavirus but the Antonine plague of 165 A.D. which started with flu-like symptoms and eventually killed more than 10million people worldwide. Over the centuries similar disasters have happened, like the plague of Justinian, some 400 years later which killed more than 25 million, the fourteenth century black death killing up to 100 million, the plague of London in 1665 leaving about 100,000 dead, more than a fifth of the population of that city and the Spanish Flu which in 1918 to 1920 killed many more people than WW I.



What are the lessons history is trying to teach us? Rather gloomily, we learn that there are always forces and events beyond our ability to control them, so we need a stoical approach to the new circumstances and strong leadership informed by the best possible advice. We need our public services to be properly funded and a shift away from the "just in time" approach to resources to a bit of spare capacity to buy us time. We are learning which of our occupations are *really* valuable and a whole new approach to public services, both national and local, is needed. We need to recognise that cooperation gets the job done more effectively than competition. We need to understand that we are not any longer a stand-alone nation but part of a global, interdependent economic and industrial world. For example, our biggest provider of flu vaccine is a French multinational, the Excel Centre, the new London Nightingale hospital, is owned in Abu Dhabi, and no volume motor manufacturer is British owned.

We face very different challenges from those of our parents and grandparents, but, like them, we face some imperatives. We must do our best to keep everybody safe during this Corvid 19 pandemic. We must find ways to deal with climate change. We must find ways to prevent wars and travesties of human dignity like Yemen, Syria, Somalia and others threatening lives and livelihoods. We must learn to live by the virtues of humility, service, kindness and wisdom. Simply, we must learn to be good to each other. Certainly coronavirus is life threatening, but selfishness, pride, hypocrisy, evil and fear threaten our very humanity.

SILVER LININGS?

1. A great deal has been and will be written about the coronavirus pandemic, so this short piece is not about that although it does offer an opportunity for reflection. About a year ago a cross-party parliamentary inquiry published a report on intergenerational unfairness. The notion has been growing that the older generation has become too comfortably off at the expense of younger people now struggling to make their way in the world.

You will be familiar with some of the arguments. Older people benefit from, or are a burden because [depending on your standpoint], free bus passes and free TV licences [at the moment], they have a triple lock on their state pension, they block expensive beds in hospitals and perhaps most importantly they own property. This is compared with a younger generation who are encumbered with debt from their university education; are obliged to find work in the gig economy and are unable to climb even the lowest rungs of the property ladder.

Perhaps the spirit of community and cooperation prompted by this emergency will help to reveal the damage done to all of us by the "me first", consumerist society. These lessons learned should heal the wounds resulting from the fear and greed of competition, especially between the old and the young, not just for the duration of the coronavirus crisis but for future generations too.

2. Our wonderful social care staff may get the recognition they deserve.
3. There is less pollution
4. You will not be bothered by unwelcome visitors
5. We shall have the time to do all those odd jobs we have been meaning to do for years.

COMMITTEE PIECE ON RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS CRISIS.

Some members of the Committee have got together to reflect on where we find ourselves in relation to this crisis. There is no appetite for political points scoring but more a desire to see how we got here and how we can move forward. There will, in the future, be a time and a place for critical appraisal but that time is not now.



It is heartening to find that suddenly the spirit of co-operation is in evidence. When Chancellor Rishi Sunak presented his first mega rescue package he was quick to praise the contribution of the TUC, individual Trade Unions and opposition parties as well as the CBI and Federation of Small Businesses. In further announcements this theme was continued by Stephen Barclay, Chief Financial Secretary to the Treasury. This goes a long way to presenting and preserving a unified approach.

We are also pleased to see the extension of the free TV Licence for over 75s to August. We obviously hope this will be further extended and we praise the work of organisations such as Age UK and the National Pensioners Convention in getting this far.

We are interested to know about any self help or support groups which have been springing up across the County.

Please use the e mail address below to let us know and we will try to inform those on our data base as best we can. We would like to do more but are a bit limited in our resources. Nonetheless we are open to ideas and opinions and please let us know. It is also important to recognise that we face this

issue coming on the back of 10 years of austerity measures, underfunding of the NHS and neglect of the Social Care system. Whilst we support the measures taken to “flatten the curve” as the jargon goes, we are also alarmed at the reports of lack of protection for health and care workers. We can applaud the massive policy U Turn taken by the government whilst questioning if it was ever necessary had different decisions been taken previously.

However, we are where we are and looking ahead we should be able to use this terrible experience to build foundations for a better future. One in which value is placed where it belongs. With our health and care workers, those in emergency services, with our posties, our delivery drivers, transport and utility workers, supermarket workers and those making things happen in our communities. This will also apply to all those working to rebuild our economy when we can get back to work. They are all being praised to the hilt on all sides. We have the chance to keep it that way.



We become wiser by adversity; prosperity destroys our appreciation of the right.” – Seneca

I had assumed that I would age with all my friends growing old around me, dying off very gradually one by one. And here was a plague that cut them off so early. Thom Gunn

WHERE TO FIND US DURING THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN

If you wish to make any comments or raise issues about **Backnumber**, please e-mail the Editor

Jim Porter at porterjames172@gmail.com

The Unison Branch Office at County Hall is closed until further notice and not able to respond to phone calls or post. The retired members e-mail address at County Hall is

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